ARCHITECTURE IN TENSION:

An Examination of the Position of the Architect in the Private and Public Sectors, Focusing on the Training and Careers of Sir Basil Spence (1907-1976) and Sir Donald Gibson (1908-1991).

Volume One of Two Volumes

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ABSTRACT

In the early 1900s tensions began to appear within the architectural profession, as private practitioners struggled to deal with the implications of professional colleagues moving into public sector employment. Sir Basil Spence and Sir Donald Gibson began their architectural training in the mid-1920s and, as tensions between the sectors intensified, Spence entered private practice and Gibson chose to enter the public sector. Each became an exemplar of his chosen sector of the profession and yet both have, until recently, escaped critical attention. The tensions between the public and private sectors of the profession have been acknowledged within the historiography, but not received detailed analysis.

This thesis advances the current historiography by presenting an examination of the division between the sectors, focusing on the relationship between the RIBA and the public sector union AASTA and assessing the influence of AASTA on Gibson's Coventry City Architect's Department.

Through an examination of archival material, contemporary published material, and buildings, this thesis builds on the work of the Sir Basil Spence Archive Project, adding detailed accounts of his early life, architectural training, and RIBA presidency, presenting new information and correcting certain aspects of the accepted historiography. It likewise presents new information on Gibson's early life and training and his central role in achieving improved status and representation for the public sector. An analysis of selected projects provides a comparative study of their contrasting approaches to architecture: the technically informed, collaborative team-work of Gibson and the individual artistry of Spence.

Both men played pivotal roles in reforming the RIBA and in changing public and professional perceptions of the architect, nevertheless, the long lineage and complex nature of tensions within the profession meant that the public/private division was never be bridged and issues of status and representation remained essentially immutable.

ABBREVIATIONS USED

AA	Architectural Association
AASTA	Association of Architects Surveyors and Technical Assistants
A&BN	*Architect and Building News*
ABT	Associated Building Technicians
AD	*Architectural Design*
AHRC	Arts and Humanities Resea*r*ch Council
AJ	*Architects' Journal*
AR	*Architectural Review*
ASAPU	Architects Surveyors
ATO	Architects' and Technicians' Organisation
BAC	Bristol Aeroplane Company
BLSA	British Library Sound Archive
BoE	Board of Education
BRS	Building Research Station
CA/CCRC	Cathedral Archive Coventry Cathedral Reconstruction Correspondence
CAI	Council for Art and Industry
CCC	Coventry City Council
CCRO	Cheshire County Records Office
CET	*Coventry Evening Telegraph*
CHC	Coventry History Centre
CISPH	Committee for the Industrial and Scientific Production of Housing
CLASP	Consortium of Local Authorities Special Programme
CS	*Coventry Standard*
DSA	Dictionary of Scottish Architects
ECA	Edinburgh College of Art
E&PC	Estates & Parliamentary Committee
GLC	Greater London Council
HC	Housing Committee (Coventry)
IAAS	Incorporated Association of Architects and Surveyors
LCC	London County Council
MARS	Modern Architectural Research Group
MDT	*Midland Daily Telegraph*
MoHLG	Ministry of Housing and Local Government
MoE	Ministry of Education
MRC	Modern Records Centre (University of Warwick)
MUA	Manchester University Archive
NCA	Nottinghamshire County Archive
OA	*Official Architect*
OAC	Official Architects' Committee
OAP	*Official Architecture and Planning*
PAC	Policy Advisory Committee (Coventry)
PJMC Percy	Johnson Marshall Collection (University of Edinburgh Library Special Collections)
RCAHMS	Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments for Scotland
RIBA	Royal Institute of British Architects

RIBAJ	*Royal Institute of British Architects' Journal*
SCCAI	Scottish Committee of the Council for Art and Industry
SMC	Salaried Members Committee
SoA	Society of Architects

ILLUSTRATIONS

Introduction.

A profession with prospects so vast,
has been split by a membership caste.

David Beecher (*RIBAJ* May 1965)[1]

By its very nature the practice of architecture is predisposed to operate against a background of tensions. Lying at the interface between art and technology, individual expression and collaborative effort, aesthetics and function, architecture crosses many professional thresholds, brings together professionals and non-professionals and affects all areas of life. While these tensions and complex inter-relationships are usually negotiated successfully by the architect, the profession as a whole has proved far less adept at negotiating its own divisions and tensions.

The most pernicious and ultimately intractable of these divisions developed in the early 1900s, between publicly employed architects and private practitioners, and the schism which opened between the sectors formed a background to the practice of architecture in Britain for most of the twentieth century.

Basil Urwin Spence and Donald Evelyn Edward Gibson began their architectural education in the mid-1920s, as divisions within the profession deepened. When they qualified in the early 1930s Spence immediately moved into private practice, Gibson chose to go into the public sector, becoming Coventry's first City Architect in 1938. Both had equally illustrious careers, Spence designing universities, Government buildings and most famously Coventry Cathedral, Gibson eventually became Controller General in the

[1] *RIBAJ*, May 1965, p.216

Ministry of Public Building and Works. By the time of Gibson's retirement in 1969, and Spence's effective withdrawal from practice in the 1970s, both architects had become exemplary figures within the profession and within their respective sectors of the profession, both had received knighthoods for their services to architecture and both had served as President of the RIBA. The two men, whose careers notably came together in post-war Coventry, provide a fascinating comparison between two architectural approaches:Gibson as an exemplar of the technically informed designer working as part of a collaborative team, and Spence exemplifying the architect as artist.

While the historiography of the profession readily acknowledges the tensions between the sectors, its causes and effects have not received detailed consideration. Spence and Gibson have likewise escaped the critical attention which their contribution to the profession warrants. In Spence's case this has now been redressed through an AHRC and HLF funded project which has allowed a reappraisal of his work, following the gift of the Spence archive, by his family, to the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland. An exhibition and publication, *Basil Spence Architect*, resulted from the project and a source book is being prepared.[2]

Spence and Gibson's prolific careers spanned four decades marked by fundamental changes in the social and political fabric of the country, the role and status of the architect and in the patronage and practice of architecture. This thesis will examine the underlying tensions within the profession during that period. It will ask why these tensions were never adequately resolved and will explore the roles which Spence and Gibson played in efforts to raise the

[2] Philip Long & Jane Thomas (eds.), *Basil Spence Architect* (National Galleries of Scotland: Edinburgh, 2007)

status of the architect, create greater unity within architecture and ameliorate the tensions between the sectors.

This thesis does not set out to produce a detailed biographical and project by project analysis of Spence and Gibson. It examines aspects of their careers which contribute to the existing body of knowledge about the two men and assesses their contribution to the development of the profession, within the context of the tensions between the sectors.

The development of the architectural profession has been examined in relation to patronage, education and politics, but the general focus of attention has tended to be the RIBA and private practice. The links between politics and modern architecture are examined by Jackson in *The Politics of Architecture*.[3] This briefly addresses the growth in the RIBA's public sector membership, but does not examine the tensions between the sectors.

Kaye examines the discourses which have shaped and informed the structure and character of the profession in *The Development of the Architectural Profession in Britain.* He explores the development of Official architecture and its rise to dominance, but does not examine the continuing conflicts between public and private beyond the election of the RIBA's first public sector President.[4] Crinson and Lubbock's work *Architecture Art or Profession?,* examines the development of architectural education, its influence on the structure and ethics of the profession and the problems created as architects tried to define their position in society. [5] There is a clear examination of the rise of the official architect, however tensions between the public and private sectors are not analysed.

[3] Anthony Jackson, T*he Politics of Architecture,* (Canada, University of Toronto, 1970)
[4] Barrington Kaye, *The Development of the Architectural Profession in Britain* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1960)
[5]Mark Crinson & Jules Lubbock, *Architecture Art or Profession?* (Manchester New York: Manchester University Press, 1994)

The conflicts which arose between architects and planners in the 1960s have been explored by Long in his thesis 'The Post-War Planning Office', which examines the work of the Coventry Planning Department, focussing on the work of Gibson's successor.[6] The difficult relationship between the architect and engineer has recently been examined by Saint in *Architect and Engineer: A Study in Sibling Rivalry.*[7]

This thesis will begin by focussing on the interface between the RIBA and its publicly employed members. It will explore the development of the schism between the sectors, the role played by the Institute in that process, and the troubled relationship between the RIBA and the public sector union AASTA. The history of AASTA has not yet been written and this thesis contributes a more detailed account of AASTA, its relationship with the RIBA and its role within the profession, than has appeared to date. The account provides a context in which to place Spence and Gibson's particular approaches to architecture, and forms the basis for the subsequent examination of the changing relationship between the sectors and the roles played by Spence and Gibson in that process.

The thesis adds to the recent work of the AHRC project by examining, in detail, Spence's formative years and architectural education and assessing how his childhood and study at Edinburgh College of Art shaped his architectural outlook. A similar examination of these aspects of Gibson's life and his training at Manchester School of Architecture will add a new body of information to the historiography and provide a comparison between the two men and between two very different architectural schools. Spence and Gibson's early career

[6] Mark Long, 'The Post-War Planning Office', PhD thesis (University of Liverpool, 1986)
[7] Andrew Saint, *Architect and Engineer: A study in sibling rivalry* (Newhaven, London: Yale University Press, 2008)

paths and selected projects will also be explored to illuminate the contrast between their approaches to design.

Gibson's experimental housing work formed the basis of this author's MA thesis, *Experimentation and Innovation in Coventry 1938-1955.*[8] His role in the post-war school building programme was examined by Andrew Saint in *Towards a Modern Architecture*. His wider career, however, and his role within the profession have largely escaped assessment. Coventry's post-war city centre has rightly received a broad range of critical analysis, but even in those discussions Gibson has tended to remain in the background.

His status as a pioneer of progressive planning, his role in improving perceptions of the public architects, and his creation of a department which became the paradigm of good public architectural practice, are often referred to. However, none of these aspects of his work have received detailed appraisal. This thesis will therefore examine the creation and organisation of Gibson's Coventry department and will explore Gibson's role and status within the public sector. Gibson and most of his Coventry team were members of AASTA and the impact of the Association's policies will be investigated, particularly in relation to the organisation and management of the department and the re-planning of the city centre.

The Second World War changed the role and status of the architect and the relationship between the two sectors. The shift in the balance of power towards the public sector and their growing influence within the RIBA will be examined with a particular focus on Gibson's role in that process.

Both architects carried out post-war housing schemes and their differing architectural approaches will be explored through two of their contemporary

[8] Andrew Saint, Towards a Social Architecture (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1987); Sarah Shaw, *Experimentation and Innovation in Coventry 1938-1955,* MA thesis (University of Keele, 1993).

post-war projects. The post-war school building programme provides an opportunity to examine the interface between the sectors and the design problems faced by architects working on post-war secondary schools. Spence and Gibson's responses to school design will again be examined through selected projects.

Spence became President of the RIBA in 1958 at a time when confidence in the Institute's leadership was at an all time low and there was open dissent between members and Council. Although the problems of this period are noted in the historiography, Spence's vital role in the reform of the Institute has been overlooked. This thesis will add to the body of information produced by the AHRC project by exploring in detail the problems which Spence faced, his approach to the presidency and his role in the constitutional reform of the Institute. Research has shown that reforms of the RIBA attributed by Glendinning to Robert Matthew actually had their genesis in Spence's presidency. This thesis ensures that Spence's contribution is rightfully acknowledged. Gibson was elected President in 1964 and his rather calmer period of office will also be examined.

There is now a growing interest in the period covered by this thesis. The architecture of the mid-twentieth-century, post-war reconstruction and the work of the public architectural sector have all received consideration in recent publications including: Robert Elwall's *Building a Better Tomorrow*;[9] *Re-forming Britain:narratives of modernity before reconstruction* by Elizabeth Darling;[10] *Man-Made Future: planning,education and design in mid-twentieth-century Britain*, edited by Iain Boyd Whyte;[11] *The Practice of Modernism: Modern*

[9] Robert Elwall, *Building a better tomorrow* (London: Wiley Academy, 2000)
[10] Elizabeth Darling, *Re-forming Britain: Narratives of modernity before reconstruction* (London: Routledge, 2007)
[11] Iain Boyd Whyte (ed), *Man-Made Future: planning,education and design in mid-twentieth-century Britain* (London: Routledge, 2007)

architects and urban transformation, 1954-1972 by John R Gold;[12] and Miles Glendinning's monograph, *Modern Architect: The life and times of Robert Matthew*.[13]

This thesis contributes to this growing body of work by taking a very different approach to the period, bringing together an exploration of the background tensions of the profession and an examination of the contemporary and contrasting careers of two of the era's most prominent yet little appraised architects.

[12] John R Gold, *The Practice of Modernism: Modern architects and urban transformation, 1954-1972* (London: Routledge, 2007)
[13] Miles Glendinning, *Modern Architect: The life and times of Robert Matthew*, (London: RIBA, 2008)

1. A Profession Divided:

The origins and growth of the schism between the sectors and the role of the Association of Architects Surveyors and Technical Assistants.

So they cut the profession in two,
To keep the 'non-U' from the 'U'.

David Beecher (*RIBAJ* May 1965) [1]

In his essay 'Using the RIBA archive: a historian's view' (Mace, 1986), Robert Thorne points to 1904 as a decisive year for the architectural profession: the point at which, just as professional divisions of the 1880s and 1890s were healing, 'the first tremors of a larger and more persistent schism began to be felt'.[2] This schism was between the private and public sectors of architecture and it would grow to become a constant thorn in the side of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA).

From its inception in 1834, the Institute set out to professionalize the practice of architecture and raise the status of the architect. By ensuring that standards of education, qualifications and means of entry to the profession were commensurate with other professional bodies, the RIBA achieved qualified successes, but always struggled against the disparity between its ideals and the realities of architectural practice, and the lack of overall cohesion within the profession.

The discord precipitated by the growth of the public sector persisted throughout its rise to dominance and the eventual resurgence of the private practitioner and, a century on from those early divisions, the profession still faces unresolved issues of professional status and public perception.

[1] *RIBAJ*, May 1965, p.216
[2] Robert Thorne, 'Using the RIBA archive: a historian's view', in Angela Mace *The Royal Institution of British Architects: A guide to its archive and history* (London, New York: Mansell Publishing, 1986), p.xxxii

The lack of cohesion within the profession tends to be masked by its historiography, which has been skewed towards the private sector. This has in turn tended to reinforce general perceptions about the relative roles and status of the public and private sectors.

While tensions between the two sectors are readily acknowledged, the causes and manifestations of the discord are not explored. Anthony Jackson's *The Politics of Architecture* (1970) briefly addresses the shift in power towards salaried architects, but does not examine public/private tensions. *The Development of the Architectural Profession in Britain* by Barrington Kaye (1960) examines the development of Official architecture and the antipathy of the private sector, but does not explore the public/private relationship beyond the election of the RIBA's first public sector President.

The position and status of the architect within each sector is inextricably linked to the tensions between the two groups, and cannot be examined in isolation. This chapter will examine the development of the public/private schism, through the interface between the RIBA (predominantly the voice of the private sector) and the Association of Architects Surveyors and Technical Assistants (AASTA), formed to represent the public sector.

The chapter will show that from the first divisions in 1904, the RIBA was never able, or entirely willing, to deal effectively with the issues of status and representation raised by the growing public sector. Salaried architecture clashed with the RIBA's vision of the profession and their handling of that disparity led directly to many of the problems which developed between the two sectors.

The chapter's focus on the RIBA/AASTA relationship during the inter-war years provides a context in which the continuing antipathy to the public sector,

during the post-war period, can be understood. It also provides a background to the state of the architectural profession during the formative years of Spence and Gibson's careers.

An exploration AASTA's approach to architecture also provides a background for the ethos, structure and organisation of Gibson's Coventry Department, the configuration and workings of which were inextricably bound up with the ideology of the AASTA.

1.1. A Union Forms:

The Architects' and Surveyors' Assistants' Professional Union (ASAPU), and the Association of Architects Surveyors and Technical Assistants (AASTA).

> Only those who felt they had no future in private work, the duffers and the "also-rans," accepted employment in official departments.
>
> Anon., 1938.[1]

At the beginning of the 1900s architects were expected to enter the profession and establish a practice or partnership, possibly after an interim period as a salaried assistant. Deteriorating economic conditions made this increasingly difficult and many had to turn to the less palatable option of salaried employment within a local authority or commercial company.

It had long been accepted that local authority engineers or surveyors could carry out minor architectural works and housing, but larger projects remained the prerogative of the private architect. This *status quo* began to alter as the State handed responsibility for elementary education to county and borough councils.[2] This new obligation led local authorities to employ

[1]'Beginnings', *Architect & Building News* (A&BN), 21 October 1938, p.67

[2]Board of Education (BoE) established 1899. 1902 & 1903 Balfour Acts transferred control of state schools from school boards to county and borough councils.

architectural staff and, with architects 'in-house', less work was given to the private sector.

The loss of potential fees troubled private architects, but there was greater concern that these salaried architects were eroding the status of the profession; they were generally placed within the Engineer's or Surveyor's department, where they worked under the command of a non-architect, whose name appeared on their work. The identification of engineers, and surveyors and builders, with architectural practice had long troubled the architectural profession. A letter to *The Artist* in 1810 had asked that 'the claims of the untaught, ignorant and presumptuous' be 'repelled with indignation and contempt'.[3] Pugin wrote that 'no engineer ever was a decent architect' and Nash saw engineers as 'an excressence from the architectural profession'.[4] The RIBA had worked to formalise the division between the trained, professional, architect and the many pretenders to the title, now that perception of status and distinction was being threatened.[5]

Local authority engineers and surveyors were also carrying out larger architectural projects themselves and, in 1904, the RIBA wrote to local authorities to advise that engineers and surveyors lacked the 'expert knowledge possessed by architects'.[6] Authorities should either take on their own architects or, better still, commission private architects.

The RIBA had to defend its members interests, however, their suggestion that local authorities would be best served by private practice implied a hierarchy of architectural quality and professionalism in which salaried architects came below the private sector.

[3] Quoted in Mordaunt Crook, 'The Pre-Victorian Architect: professionalism & patronage', *Architectural History* Vol.12 (1969), p.67
[4] Ibid., p.67
[5] The tensions between the architectural profession and other constructional professions is examined in Mordaunt Crook (1969)
[6] Robert Thorne in Mace (1986), p.xxxiii

This stance clearly divided the sectors and, sadly, it was an attitude which became all too familiar. The RIBA was, though, in a very difficult position. It had been formed to establish 'uniformity and respectability of practice' within architecture.[7] It had fought to protect and enhance the professional standing of its membership, then private practitioners, and had ensured that architecture was set on a professional footing through control of architectural education and qualification.[8] For the RIBA to support low paid architectural assistants, working under the control of non-architects in local authority departments, a huge shift would be required in the ethos of the Institute and against the general prejudice that only the talentless would take up salaried employment.[9]

Local authorities took little notice of the recommendation and increasingly carried out their own architectural work. The enlargement of the London County Council's architectural department, in 1912, led the RIBA to set up a committee to look into the extent and significance of public sector architecture.[10] It concluded that local authorities should use both sectors for their work, but offered no active support for the public sector. Six years later the Institute appointed the 'Future of Architecture and the Architectural Profession Special Committee'. Charged with considering unity within the profession and 'the increasingly problematical relationship between public and private practice', the committee seems to have achieved very little.[11]

The low status accorded to public sector architects remained a concern, and in 1919 two new organisations were formed. The Official Architects'

[7] Mace (1986), p.xvi
[8] Barrington Kaye, *The development of the architectural profession in Britain* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1960). pp 158-59
[9] John Summerson, 'Bread & Butter and Architecture', *Horizon* (Oct 1942) (London: Horizon, 1942), p.234
[10] The LCC department had a staff of 187 in 1912: Mace (1986), p.xxxiii
[11] Mace (1986), p.xxi

Association had a relatively short existence, but the Architects' and Surveyors' Assistants' Professional Union (ASAPU) enjoyed much greater success.[12]

From the outset it was well organised and combative, using both the technical and general press to publicise its message. In 1920 delegates from all over the country attended its first national convention. A pamphlet produced by the Union outlined its purpose:

> The Union is not concerned particularly with ARCHITECTURE as an Art or Profession. It desires to raise the general standard of the design, construction and craft detail of BUILDING, and to ensure to the worker who produces these a standard of living compatible with his technical acquirements and skill.[13]

The statement sent out two clear signals. Firstly it alluded to the 'art or profession' debate which had divided architects in the 1890s.[14] Secondly it showed a clear link to Clause IV of the Labour Party's Constitution.[15] The 'art or profession' debate, which resulted from the RIBA's plans for structured architectural education, compulsory examination and registration, had split the profession into those who saw architecture as a profession and supported the Institute's plans and those who believed that the practice of architecture depended on innate artistic ability which could not be taught or examined.[16]

In distancing themselves from this debate, the ASAPU were defining the Union as an advocate for concerns not yet addressed by the profession, rather than a new body reiterating old arguments. The choice of words: 'building', not 'architecture' and 'worker', not 'architect', clearly aligned the Union with the practicalities of working in architecture and the 'art' side of the debate, rather

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[12] *Official Architect (OA,)* August 1938, p.341; Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick (MRC) MSS.78/BT/10/1/1

[13] MRC MSS.78/BT/10/1/1 Pamphlet June 1920 (the use of capitals follows the original)

[14] This schism is discussed in Crinson & Lubbock *Architecture: Art or Profession?* (Manchester: MUP, 1994), pp.61-64 and also in Kaye (1960), pp.135-141

[15] Clause IV adopted by the Labour Party in 1918.

[16] Statutory registration would restrict use of the title Architect to architects who had passed a recognised professional qualification

than with the RIBA, thus signalling an implicit distinction between the independent practitioner and the public employee.

The perception that the salaried sector provided work for less able architects was now well entrenched and is highlighted in an exchange of letters between Percy Farmer, of the ASAPU, and *The Architect,* which had suggested that no self-respecting architectural assistant would remain an assistant. Farmer called their comments 'misleading and cruel to a large body of men who […] have literally no chance whatever of becoming practitioners.'[17] *The Architect* argued that if an architect could not make a living from private practice then 'he must blame his temperament and abilities, and not his chances: he is unfitted for the calling he has chosen, and, possibly, for most others.'[18]

The lengthy exchange between the ASAPU and *The Architect* also touched on another factor in the attitude towards salaried architects: the class-based perception of paid employment. The RIBA had re-cast architecture as a professional occupation and the success of the private architect depended on his professional ability and business acumen.[19] He could accept or decline commissions, and received a fee, not a wage, for bringing his intellectual and design skills to bear upon a project. For salaried architects, regardless of equivalent training and qualifications, the receipt of a wage implied a lack of both ability and business acumen. They had no choice in the work they did, no control over the remuneration they received, and any design input was cloaked by the official stamp of the, generally non-architect, head of the department. As Maxwell Fry would put it later:

> Salaried architects are […] the slaves of their masters. That is the view which certain sections of the profession take. They refer to official architecture as something which is not so good as something which is

[17] MRC. MSS.78/BT/10/1/1 Letter, 5 February 1921
[18] MRC. MSS.78/BT/10/1/1 *The Architect,* 11 February 1921, p.99
[19] The definition of 'profession' is discussed in Kaye (1960), pp.14-21

> called the “free field.” The man who is bound must be inferior if he accepts slavery and practices a mutilated version of his free art’.[20]

For the salaried assistant in a private office the attitude was very different. His employment was viewed as a necessary step on the way towards partnership or sole practice. He could exercise his design skills and oversee small jobs and was therefore not a ‘bound man’. The reality of his working life, however, was often far from the perceived view, with very poor pay and conditions. These employees, although employed privately, were always included in the Union’s concerns.

In 1924 the ASAPU became the Association of Architects, Surveyors and Technical Assistants (AASTA), but nothing altered in its relationship with the RIBA. Recommendations for minimum salary scales, representation of salaried architects within the RIBA, problems of overcrowding in the profession and status all became familiar themes in the strained relationship.

[20] *Keystone,* December 1936, p.112

1.2. AASTA's relationship with the Royal Institute of British Architects, 1924-1940.

> 'It has a job to do for a certain class
> and it is doing it'.
>
> Vivian Leslie Nash, 1935.[1]

An article entitled 'Those salaried men', appeared in the *Architects' Journal* (*AJ*) in August 1927. It summed up the prejudice faced by salaried architects and placed the blame squarely with the private sector:

> There are many in the profession who still regard the salaried architect or assistant as occupying but a temporary place in the evolution of the complete architect. They do not admit the existence of any but master and pupils, or masters and students, and those who remain assistants for any lengthy time they regard as failures, as a section of the profession of little importance and one which has no rights and few privileges. […]
>
> The chief blame […] must lie at the door of private practising architects. They are the natural leaders of the profession; their members hold every position of importance and influence; […] and although actually a minority in the profession they dominate and guide its policy.
>
> They regard themselves as the only representatives of true architecture; official and salaried architects and assistants they anathematize as strange beings who have wrought infinite harm to the profession, i.e. to themselves. […] where prudence would have urged assimilation, fear has prompted successfully their exclusion.[2]

While clearly articulating the antipathy between the two sides of the profession, the impression is given of two groups, each cohesive in their own right, but this was illusory. The public sector could claim a degree of unanimity within its ranks, but had its own subtle divisions (see page 28). The private sector was far from cohesive and debate about registration highlighted the divisions and eventually led to the public sector gaining its first representation on the RIBA Council.

[1] MRC. MSS.78/BT/1/5/2. Leslie Nash speaking at the Caxton Hall meeting 1935.
[2] MRC. MSS.78/BT/5/4/1-10 *AJ,* 17 August 1927.

The Society of Architects (SoA), formed by disaffected RIBA members in 1884, had always supported registration and was persuaded to re-join the Institute in 1925.[3] This healed one rift, but created another with the formation of a breakaway group, the Incorporated Association of Architects and Surveyors (IAAS). The IAAS opposed registration because the technical qualifications stipulated for registering as an architect would effectively eliminate architect-surveyors from the profession.[4] AASTA also opposed registration, but the relationship between the groups was one of lasting acrimony and the RIBA ensured that they remained apart by offering AASTA a seat on the Council.

The first Registration Bill in 1927 failed to win Government approval, as did a second draft in 1928. AASTA could now name its terms for supporting further applications and the RIBA acquiesced. A Salaried Members' Committee (SMC) was set up and AASTA was granted two seats on the Registration Committee, in return they backed the Registration Bill and the IAAS were left isolated.[5] An amended Bill was finally passed in 1931.

The rapprochement between AASTA and the Institute was brief. After a decade of pressing for limits on student numbers and having had proposals for a salary scale for assistants in private offices rejected, AASTA cut all official links with the RIBA. In April 1934 AASTA representatives on the SMC resigned and members on the RIBA Council were withdrawn. The Association continued

[3] The SoA was formed following the RIBA's failure to extend voting rights to Associate members.

[4] This particular class of practitioners faced a hostility rooted in the nineteenth century practice of measuring, an activity much abused by some architects who over-calculated work done and materials used on site, in order to increase their commissions and the builder's wages (Kaye (1960), p.72-73); The earliest RIBA regulations singled out measuring as cause for disqualification from membership (Kaye (1960), p.81).

[5] To strengthen its case for Registration the RIBA actively promoted membership and created the Licentiate class to allow non-qualified architects to join if they met certain requirements (see note 36). The *RIBAJ* records large numbers of Licentiates being elected, especially in the latter months of 1930.

to have a presence on the Architects Registration Council and on the Board of Architectural Education.[6]

With official ties broken the Institute could have exercised some damage limitation, instead it 'seemed ready to leap at any chance of denigrating the achievements of the largest employer of assistants, the public sector'.[7]

1935 proved to be a significant year for the architectural profession as the radical left gained a stronger voice through the creation of the short lived Architects' and Technicians' Organisation (ATO).[8] It also marked a turning point for AASTA, which changed from a body 'plodding along in the background with a mild up-with-the-under-dog policy' to an organisation 'infused … with vitality', which 'greatly enlarged its membership [and] flushed a deep political colour'.[9] This change is borne out by the first appearance of overtly political comment in *Keystone*.

The year also witnessed relations between AASTA and the RIBA reach a new low. In June 1935, an RIBA Committee on Official Architecture, chaired by Sir Raymond Unwin, advised that if local authorities wanted innovative architecture they should turn to private architects. It suggested that their own employees, 'cumbered about with much serving', were probably more able as administrators than designers.[10] The report should have raised vociferous protest from AASTA, but its publication came just days after an angry audience had packed into Caxton Hall, London, to debate a circular which the RIBA had sent to 2,250 local authorities.[11]

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[6] MRC. MSS.78/BT/4/1/8 April 1934
[7] Robert Thorne in Mace (1986), p.xxxiii
[8] See Peter Coe, *Lubetkin and Tecton : Architecture and Social Commitment : A Critical Study*, (London: Arts Council of Great Britain and University of Bristol, 1981)
[9] John Summerson, 'Bread & Butter and Architecture' in *Horizon* Vol.6 No.34, October 1942, p.236
[10] *RIBAJ,* 8 June 1935, p.862
[11] *Keystone,* June 1935, p.42

The circular reiterated, in nearly all respects, the thoughts expressed in the 1904 memorial: architectural work should not be undertaken by non-qualified people and private practitioners should be employed to ensure the 'most satisfactory results'.[12]

The Institute had defended the circular, claiming that it was meant to persuade employers that the title of Registered Architect was the only real qualification for an architect. They argued that no preference had been shown towards private architects. AASTA, however, viewed it as a deliberate and calculated attack 'upon the qualifications, ability and even the integrity of a considerable section of salaried architects'.[13] The 'insidious attacks' were intended to 'discredit those in official departments […] on grounds of both competence and integrity, and to discredit them in the eyes of their employers'.[14]

The public meeting, supported by the ATO, was held on June 4th and the packed audience listened to a passionate denunciation of the RIBA by Seymour Reeves, Secretary to AASTA.[15] He believed the circular to be a 'flagrant advertisement for private practising architects' and accused the RIBA of practising 'duplicity', whilst claiming that AASTA had attempted to 'produce co-operation between the two bodies' and 'prevent conflict' so that 'the different sections of the profession should pull together for a common aim'.[16]

Reeves questioned why the circular did not mention registration, if its purpose was to highlight the title 'Registered Architect'. The only implication of the circular was that 'the real qualification for an architect is that he should be in private practice'.[17]

[12] *Keystone,* June 1935, p.42
[13] MRC. MSS.78/BT/1/5/2
[14] Ibid.
[15] *Keystone,* August 1935, p.71-79.
[16] MRC. MSS.78/BT/1/5/2
[17] Ibid.

He then turned to suggestions that the RIBA could be changed from within by getting 'young blood' onto the RIBA Council; this proposal was unrealistic because half of the Council was appointed, not elected, every member had to be a Fellow of the Institute and the opportunities for salaried architects to become Fellows were 'almost negligible'. [18] This was indeed correct; there was no mechanism at all for public architects to be elected as Fellows until the Institute's Charter of 1925. This allowed Associates or Licentiates, not in private practice, to apply for Fellowship provided that they were, or had been, in a position of responsibility for the design of architectural work. The structure of most local authority departments, however, denied many architects the opportunity to design and any work they produced was unlikely to carry their name. In such circumstances proving responsibility for design was very difficult.[19]

Reeves suggested that, 'instead of pursuing a shadow pantomime […] with this idea of "young blood" on the Council or administration of the Institute', salaried architects should try to effect change through their membership of the Registration Council. [20]

This motion was seconded by the Chairman of AASTA, Leslie Nash, who said the RIBA had 'a job to do for a certain class' and was doing it; however, he believed that the whole architectural system was at fault:

> There is the question of propaganda which goes on within the schools, in the private offices, and in all sorts of ways. The aim of this propaganda is to foster in every conceivable way the idea that private practice is the

[18] MRC. MSS.78/BT/1/5/2
[19] There were three levels of RIBA membership: Licentiate, Associate and Fellow. Licentiate membership was open to any practising, but unqualified, architect who was aged 30 or over and had been a principal for at least 5 successive years, or who had 10 successive years in the practice of architecture. Associate membership was open to qualified architects, aged 21 or older, who had worked as an architect for less than 7 years, application had to be supported by three Fellows of the Institute. Neither class had any voting rights until 1925. Nominees for Fellowship had to be Associates, or Licentiates who had passed a qualifying exam for the Fellowship, were aged 30 or over and had worked as a principal for at least 7 successive years.
[20] MRC. MSS.78/BT/1/5/2

> only form of practice worth while. The competitions system helps this idea and is intended to convince every student that he will soon be a private practitioner and that he need think of nothing else. Let us be quite clear that there is no question of reforming the RIBA or expecting the leopard to change his spots.[21]

A member of the audience supported this view: 'the general impression one would gather from the school at which I study is that you are pretty certain to become a prosperous private practitioner the moment you leave – not the prospect of unemployment or else salaried occupation'.[22]

Students were one group with which AASTA particularly wanted to identify. Nash had produced a report during 1935, setting out a new direction for the Association. It had to become a 'prestige organisation' which could provide the same standard of services for salaried architects that the RIBA provided for the private sector.[23] AASTA had to stop feeling inferior to the RIBA, and should identify itself with the 'advanced' approach of young architects and students, rather than the 'largely reactionary' stance of the Institute.[24]

As part of this new approach, AASTA set up three working groups and a technical panel and began to carry out research, as the ATO was doing.[25] ATO members, many of them Communists, gradually joined AASTA and the Association became increasingly politicised.[26] Membership had been falling, but the increase in politically active members, such as ATO member A W Cleeve Barr, brought a new vitality to the organisation. It also brought divisions between the younger generation and the old-guard AASTA leadership. Matters

[21] MRC. MSS.78/BT/1/5/2
[22] Ibid.
[23] Stephen Parsons, 'Communism in the Professions: the organisation of the British Communist Party among professional workers, 1933-1956', PhD Thesis (University of Warwick 1990), p.425
[24] Ibid., p.425
[25] Ibid., p.425
[26] In 1939 AASTA gave honorary membership to ATO members, including Erno Goldfinger, Berthold Lubetkin and Frank Skinner, who were not salaried and therefore not eligible to join the Association: *Keystone,* February 1939, p.23

came to a head in February 1936 when the Secretary was forced to resign. Barr applied for the post and in March 1936 became the new Secretary.[27]

Despite the animosity expressed at the Caxton Hall meeting, evidence shows that relations between Institute and Association were, perhaps, not as bad as AASTA suggested. At that meeting there had been one brave voice of moderation from an employee of Raymond Unwin, who believed salaried architects had more support within the RIBA than they thought and warned against cutting themselves adrift from the Institute.[28]

Although this view was unpalatable to AASTA there is evidence which tends to support it. AASTA's withdrawal from the RIBA, in 1934, had been precipitated by the Council's rejection of a minimum salary scale, yet the rejection had been by a 'narrow majority'.[29] The *Keystone* report on the Council for the 1937-38 session, noted that AASTA's proposals for a more democratic representation of Associates on the Council had been defeated by seventy-seven votes to sixty-six.[30] Again this was not the overwhelming majority which might have been expected on the basis of the antipathy between the two groups.

A letter written by London architect, D.L.Bridgwater to Percy Johnson-Marshall, Secretary to the Coventry Branch of AASTA, in February 1940, illustrates a view from the other side of the fence. Johnson-Marshall had written seeking support for the 'Coventry of Tomorrow' exhibition. Bridgewater was

[27]Parsons (1990) p.422; Albert William Cleeve Barr (1910-2000) studied briefly at Liverpool School of Architecture in 1934. He joined the Hertfordshire schools' team in 1948, then moved to the housing division of the LCC architect's department. He worked for the MoE Development Group 1957-59, then became Chief Architect for the MoHLG. In 1964 he became Chief Architect, then Managing Director, to Gibson's newly created National Buildings Agency: Andrew Saint, *The Guardian,* 8 June 2000.
[28] MRC. MSS.78/BT/1/5/2
[29] *Keystone,* February 1937, p.17
[30] *Keystone,* February 1938, p.25

keen to help and offered to speak to various people, including the RIBA, but he then wrote:

> Your note about the AASTA being unpopular at the RIBA rather amuses me, as this is hardly the case. It would be truer I think to say that the RIBA was unpopular at the AASTA. All this antagonism between Societies and the squabbles between private and official architects seems to me to be doing more harm to architecture than any trouble existing today.
>
> In this matter it seems to me that the AASTA go rather out of their way to accentuate the difficulties rather than help to solve them. I feel this, even while being a great admirer of much of the work that is being done by the ASSTA (sic), and when this Society gives out its list of aims as entirely to do with one group of architects, that is salaried members, and in its published aims gives no indication of its attitude to ordinary practising members, and to architecture generally, it cannot complain, I think, that there are some thousands of members of the profession who feel that its work is not always for the good of Architecture, with a capital A.[31]

Perhaps AASTA did 'accentuate the difficulties', but they needed to keep issues at the front of people's minds, and that could not be done if a less combative stance was taken. An effective campaign also required a central enemy on which to focus, and the RIBA was an easier target than individual councils whose actions were, arguably, the root cause of the status and wage problems.

In February 1937 the AASTA journal *Keystone* heralded the New Year with an olive branch to the Institute: 'There have in the past been serious differences between the AASTA and the RIBA. But there has been too much acrimony in our relations in the past for us to wish to dwell on them. Let us look to the future.'[32] The gesture marked the re-establishment of official links with the Institute, but little change in their relationship. Later that year, when the RIBA produced a recommended salaries scale for salaried members in public, commercial and private offices, AASTA was unimpressed because the contrast

[31] Percy Johnson-Marshall Collection (PJMC). GB0237/PJM/ABT/E 3 of 3. Letter from DL Bridgwater, 8 February 1940. Johnson-Marshall's original letter does not exist
[32] *Keystone,* February 1937, p.3

between architects and assistants' salaries showed a bias 'should raise a storm of protest from its Assistant members all over the country'.[33]

Whether the protest was raised is not recorded, but as 1937 drew to a close, Goodhart-Rendel's Presidential Address to the RIBA succeeded in instigating a 'volcanic row' which deepened professional divisions.[34]

Rendel was careful to state that he was giving his personal views, not those of the RIBA, but he must have realised that many members would not accept this, especially when he moved into the contentious area of official architecture.

Public sector employment usefully reduced competition in the 'already crowded [private] market', but official architectural departments were like 'slot machines in which you pay your penny, but cannot take your choice; you expect chocolates and chocolates you will get, of admirable quality but sometimes a little stale'.[35] The suggestion that official architects produced a standardised, stale confection caused consternation.[36] As the journal *Official Architect* noted, the 'rumblings of dissatisfaction', which had been heard for a long time, now became 'something in the nature of an earthquake'.[37]

Official Architect (OA) had commenced publication in September to provide 'a monthly medium for the Salaried Architect' and now fulfilled its purpose. Seven pages of its December issue were filled with correspondence from across the country, and the journal apologised that space constraints had prevented many letters from being published.[38] The journal's editorial board condemned the speech and called on staff and official architects to use the next

[33] *Keystone,* August 1937, p.11
[34] Summerson (1942), p.236
[35] Anthony Jackson, *The Politics of Architecture,* (Canada: University of Toronto, 1970), p.175; *OA,* November 1937, p.53
[36] Kaye (1960), p.166
[37] *OA,* December 1937, p.86
[38] *OA,* December 1937, pp.110-116

RIBA elections to 'secure nominations, and, once in power, to set a standard of gentlemanly business conduct worthy of the dignity of a learned professional body'.[39]

William Hamlyn FRIBA, Chief Architect to the LMS Railway, presented his thoughts on the 'enormity of Mr Goodhart-Rendel's offence against professional decency'.[40] The President had created a situation which might, 'if not handled with considerable ability and diplomacy, resolve into a crisis in the profession which all concerned with its welfare might eventually deplore'.[41]

He noted the President's declaration that he was not speaking on the Council's behalf, but believed that the views of both were clearly in accord:

> can he deny that the attitude of the Council is in any way different from his own? Is it not the fact that for many years the policy of the Institute has been directed against official architecture, and that by every means, direct statements both verbal and written, by innuendo and suggestion, attempts have been consistent to undermine the confidence of employers in their official or staff architects?

Resolution of the issue rested with members being 'inspired with some degree of animation leading to action', it did not lie with the Council:

> Ten years ago the writer warned the Council of the Institute that the profession was a house divided against itself and to-day that is more apparent than ever. Whether the present Council or any other of a similar constitution can provide a policy of statesmanship to heal the breach is doubtful.[42]

The majority of letters to *OA* agreed with these views, but one architect pointed out that the President's address would do little harm because official architects were already 'regarded as the scum and backwash of official service'.[43] The comment was tongue-in-cheek, but summed up the failure of the public sector to change general perceptions of their status.

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[39] *OA,* November 1937, p.53
[40] *OA,* December 1937, p.97
[41] Ibid., p.97
[42] *OA,* December 1937, p.98
[43] *OA,* December 1937, p.111

Correspondence regarding the affair appeared in the *OA* for the next three months and the epithet 'stale chocolate' was never forgotten. In July 1939 Stanley Hall, in his first official engagement as RIBA President, opened an Exhibition of Official Architecture at the Building Centre. Under the heading 'Fresh Chocolate', the Editorial of *OA* believed that this augured 'a warmer co-operation between private and official architects' and noted that while 'the inconceivable unworthiness of the 'stale chocolate' *blague* [...] will be long remembered', official architects had not taken the easy route of 'descending to the same low level'.[44] Instead the exhibition constituted 'a more dignified *riposte*, and one having a constructive value, so lacking in a weak spitefulness'.[45]

The ‘stale chocolate' accusation had been particularly insensitive, but it must be noted that it was not entirely unjustified. Illustrations in *OA* reveal examples of architecture which was certainly stolid and stale and a report in *Keystone,* in December 1938, examining the results of an AASTA survey, suggested that private partnership ‘formerly the backbone of the profession’ was ‘still producing much of the best architecture’.[46] Summerson, in his 1942 article ‘Bread & Butter and Architecture’, also felt that the description had not been ‘entirely without point’.[47] He believed, though, that the fault lay with the system rather than the ability of the architect, because ‘while tradition and circumstance favoured the individual rich client with his private architect, “official” architecture was very liable indeed to be stale’. He felt the RIBA President had been unable to see that ‘”official” architecture *need not be* either as second-hand or as tepid as his simile implied; nor, for that matter, did he see

[44] *OA,* July 1939, p.703
[45] Ibid.
[46] *Keystone,* December 1938, p11-12
[47] Summerson (1942), p.236

that the scales had already turned which would bring the brains and enthusiasm of the young down on the side of the departments.'[48]

In the same year as Goodhart-Rendel's Address, the Institute failed to accept AASTA's nominees for the RIBA Council. One of those rejected was R.D.Manning, an assistant with Middlesex County Council, an active presence within the upper levels of AASTA and a contributor of forthright pieces to *Keystone.* Although angered by the RIBA's action, AASTA took the rejection as a back-handed compliment to Manning's 'outspokenness in the cause of the salaried architect'. The additional dropping of Miss Justin Blanco-White and Mr R Townsend from the Junior Members Committee, led *Keystone* to wonder whether the Council of the Institute intended to 'exclude all progressive and militant members from its Committee'.[49]

Lack of representation for official architects on the RIBA Council and Executive was a long standing issue and Goodhart-Rendel's Presidential Address brought an added sense of urgency to the matter. Many of the letters to *OA* called on salaried members to put all their efforts into ensuring that sympathetic candidates were elected to the Council.

The Salaried Members Committee (set up in 1928) and the Junior Members' Committee (set up in 1935) had given some voice to salaried architects in both sectors.[50] A proposal, in 1934, to form an Institute of Official Architects had not progressed because forming an organisation outside the RIBA was considered undesirable.

The creation of the standing Official Architects' Committee (OAC) for heads of official departments, in July 1937, at last provided a dedicated platform within the Institute for the public sector, and gave them representation

[48] Summerson (1942), p.236
[49] *Keystone,* October-November 1938, p.17-18
[50] *OA,* August 1938, p.341; Mace (1986), p.285

on the Council. It was, however, only representative of the upper echelons of that sector. In February 1938, members of the newly formed OAC joined representatives from the RIBA Executive to form a joint committee.[51] This appears to have been a prelude to the Executive, for the first time, including two public sector architects in their list of official nominations for the elections to Council.[52]

The creation of the OAC had been followed by the publication of the new journal *Official Architect.* While *Keystone* represented, predominantly, the views of the lower tiers of the public sector, *OA* tended to carry the views and opinions of the higher tiers and as such provides an important alternative perspective on the divisions between the public sector and the RIBA. It also reveals tensions and anomalies within the salaried sector itself, which tend to be masked by the more prominent division between the public and private sectors.

The constitution and bye-laws governing the composition of the RIBA Council and the requirements for election to Fellowship had always been a major stumbling block to achieving representation for the public sector. On the surface the issue seemed to be clearly defined: the structure of the RIBA denied the majority of salaried Associate members the opportunity to apply for Fellowship and therefore prevented them from standing for Council. The issue was, however, more complex. As the pages of the *OA* show, by the late 1930s most counties, many boroughs and a growing number of cities had chief architects and the vast majority of these were Fellows. Therefore, while AASTA argued, with justification, that the salaried Associate member was effectively barred from access to Council, and thereby denied effective representation, in

[51] *OA,* February 1938, p.174
[52] *OA,* May 1938, pp.237-38

theory, an opportunity for representation did exist, something which is not readily apparent within the pages of *Keystone*. Why then was this route not pursued or promoted by AASTA?

The Association wanted to achieve parity of status and opportunity for salaried architects within the profession and the Institute. To have any hope of success, it was essential that the RIBA was persuaded to effect fundamental changes to its administrative structure and statutes. Conceivably, therefore, AASTA may have weakened its argument for such change had it been content simply to accept existing salaried Fellows as Council representatives.

It must also be acknowledged that many of the putative representatives may have had no desire either to stand for Council or to speak on behalf of the salaried sector. Even had they wished to do so, it would have been difficult for AASTA to convince members that such men were representative of the rank and file. Existing salaried Fellows would have achieved their status through work in the private sector and could still be linked in perception, if not in practice, to that sector and to the source of the schism within the profession. In the majority of cases salaried Fellows entered the sector as chief architects, a position which was virtually unattainable for those at the lower levels of the hierarchy. Whilst a Fellow could choose to become a salaried architect, a salaried architect stood almost no chance of becoming a Fellow.

Finally, generational divisions have to be considered. It was a younger generation of architects who were increasingly turning to public sector employment and they required representation which reflected their outlook, training and experience within the profession; such a viewpoint was unlikely to be found among existing salaried Fellows.

While there were clearly many factors which might reasonably have militated against AASTA turning to salaried Fellows to represent them, an examination of correspondence to the *OA,* in the wake of the 'stale chocolate' affair, suggests another more disturbing factor in the complex relationship between membership classes and employment status: the stigma attached to official architecture was powerful enough to affect even Fellows of the Institute if they moved into salaried employment.

Of the many letters condemning the President's Address, a large number, such as William Hamlyn's, were from Fellows. Among these a significant number specifically mentioned the urgent need for adequate representation within the RIBA.[53] Noel Hill, Manchester City Architect, called on salaried members to support the setting up of an organisation within the RIBA, which would 'provide a mouthpiece through which the unified opinions of official architects could be voiced'.[54] The editorial board of *OA*, the majority of whom were Fellows, gave Hill's proposal unqualified support and were eager to 'render all possible service tending towards its successful accomplishment'.[55]

Such correspondence suggests that feelings of disenfranchisement were not confined to salaried Associate and Licentiate members of the RIBA. The fact that salaried Fellows were also prepared to call for greater representation suggests that they too felt unable to influence the Institute. The most obvious cause for this would appear to be that their status as salaried architects overrode their status as Fellows and that, regardless of any former private practice and their class of membership they became, to an extent, victims of the negative perception of the public sector.

[53]Among the Fellows whose correspondence specifically mentions representation for the salaried sector, are the county architects for Middlesex and East Sussex, the city architects for Manchester and Exeter, the borough architect for Newport and the chief architect for the LMS Railways: *OA,* November and December 1937.
[54]*OA,* December 1937, p.110
[55]*OA,* December 1937, p.86

In August 1939, open divisions within the public sector surfaced when the *OA* carried an ill-tempered correspondence, between an Editor and Barr, concerning the publicity given to nominated candidates for the RIBA Council. [56]

Barr complained that the journal had claimed success for five of its nominees in the Council elections, but two of those named had been nominated by AASTA. *OA* had also emboldened the name of the Chair of the Official Architects' Committee, but not the names of the two other representatives of the salaried sector, who happened to work as assistants, nor had it counted their names among the representatives of 'Official and Staff Architects'. It was, believed Barr, 'a bias in favour of the interests of principals and against the interests of assistants' which was 'to be deplored'.[57]

In return, *OA* accused AASTA of giving prominence to their own candidates in *Keystone*: 'you have given preference to what might be termed "your own people" and have appended "our" people as a sort of afterthought'.[58] Barr responded that no deliberate preference had been shown or intended; *Keystone* had limited space and *OA* representatives 'might well have resented being tied up more definitely with all the aspects of AASTA policy'.[59] The Editors' final word on the matter can have done nothing to ameliorate the situation:

> We confess to having experienced […] a dawning doubt as to whether any co-operation as we understand it would be possible with those whose interpretation of a joint effort was to take all and give little. […] there began to dawn also a suspicion that it might be just possible that the interpretation given by the Council of the AASTA to the desire for fair and reasonable co-operation might not be in accord with that held by us or even by the majority of the architects' and surveyors' assistants throughout the country. On receipt of the letter first given above [Barr's letter regarding *Keystone*] this suspicion was no longer in doubt.[60]

[56] *OA,* August 1939, pp.788-89
[57] *OA,* August 1939, p.788
[58] Ibid., p.789
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.

The fact that AASTA had difficulties working with members of its own sector of the profession and that even within that sector its relationships were coloured by perceptions of status, serves to highlight just how inherently difficult its relationship with the RIBA was. With the outbreak of war, open divisions within the profession had to be buried beneath the need for architects to work, or to appear to work, together. Nevertheless, while disagreements seem to have been aired less frequently, they certainly continued

2. Spence and Gibson:
Their early years and the beginnings of divergence.

Spence and Gibson began their architectural training in the mid 1920s. Tensions and divisions between the public and private sectors of the profession had grown steadily over the preceding two decades, and the RIBA had proved at best unable, and at worst unprepared, to ameliorate the situation.

In seeking to give the discipline a more professional status and raise the perceived status of the architect, the RIBA had gained a tight control over architectural education, had restricted the routes of entry into the profession and had managed to sever most of its direct links with the dubious commercial world of construction.

In the process of professionalizing architecture, however, the RIBA had created a hierarchical structure which lacked flexibility and limited its ability to respond to the changing needs of its members. From the early 1900s growing numbers of architectural positions were created in the public sector, and the nature of this employment, which fell outside the parameters of the Institute's experience and expectations, created fundamental, long-lasting and damaging divisions.

Architectural education had been formulated at a time when private practice was envisaged as the only route for professional advancement and, despite the growing public sector, its focus remained unchanged. Schools of architecture played a central role in perpetuating the idea of private practice as the only goal for the architectural student and contributed (albeit passively rather than actively) to the perceived hierarchy between the status of the public and private sectors. This hierarchy was entrenched within the profession when Spence and Gibson began their architectural education.

By the end of their training, the divisions between the sectors had worsened, but the attitude in some schools was subtly changing as Modernist conceptions of architecture as a collaborative, socially based tool began to filter into architectural education. By the mid 1930s the Beaux-Arts system, with its emphasis on architecture as an essentially individualistic and competitive process, had to accommodate students who viewed architecture as a social and political issue, the problems of which could only be solved through collaboration between architecture, social research, planning, science and technology.

Spence qualified in 1931 and immediately went into private practice; Gibson qualified in the following year and, after a short time in private practice, moved into the public sector where he remained for the rest of his career. Through an exploration of their formative years, architectural education and personal characteristics, this chapter will examine the factors which helped to shape each man's architectural ethos and which influenced their decision to go into different sectors of the profession.

Gibson was born into a comfortable, middle class family and spent his first eleven years in Scotland, before the family returned to England. In contrast Spence spent his first eleven years in Bombay before the family moved to Scotland. His parents were not well off and financial worries dogged Spence's years at Edinburgh College of Art. Both men witnessed the effects of poverty as they were growing up, Gibson in Dundee and Spence to a much greater extent in Bombay. While it will be argued that Gibson's experience, combined with an innate social awareness and self-deprecation, guided his decision to enter the public architectural sector, Spence's precarious personal finances combined with a high degree of artistic ability and ambition, forged self-reliance, a need

for financial security, individual expression and recognition and, therefore, led into a career in private practice.

Edinburgh College of Art (ECA) was ideally suited to Spence's natural ability and individualism. Gibson's technical, rather than artistic ability was nurtured by the more scientific and technological approach of Manchester School of Architecture. The curriculum and ethos of each of the schools will be discussed in relation to the individual approaches taken by Spence and Gibson to the process of architectural design.

Examination of their early careers will be followed by a more detailed analysis of selected projects which highlight their very different approaches to design. In Gibson's case only one building - the Hilary Haworth Nursery, Lache, near Chester - will be discussed as an exemplar of his technological and social approach to architectural design. Spence's highly artistic, and more eclectic, approach will be examined through his work as an exhibition designer for the 1938 Empire Exhibition, Glasgow.

2.1. Basil Urwin Spence: Formative years, training and early career.

2.1a. Bombay, 1907-1919.

> 'if you would be a *real* architect, you must
> always have either pencil or chisel in your hand'.
> Henry Wilson, 1892.[1]

Jane Thomas's paper 'Evolution of a Practice', in *Basil Spence Architect*, opens with three photographs of Spence which speak eloquently of the man and his early career.[2] In the first Spence stands alongside presentation drawings for the 1949 Scottish Industries Exhibition, Kelvin Hall, Glasgow; elegant, immaculately dressed and carefully posed, this is the image conscious, brilliant draughtsman and the successful architect and exhibition designer to whom a client could turn with absolute confidence (see Figure 1). The other two photographs show the child behind the man; one, a diffident, slightly uneasy, out-of-place, twelve year old, looking self-consciously at the camera, wearing the high, stiff collar, kilt and sporran of George Watson's College, Edinburgh and the other a smiling, confident four year old, gazing out from beneath a large solar topee, every inch a child of the Raj.

Spence was born in Bombay, on the 13th August 1907, a first son to Urwin Spence, an assayer at His Majesty's Royal Mint, Bombay, and his wife Daisy. Spence's family was of Orkney descent and formed part of a sizeable Scottish population within the city.[3] Scotland was a distant and seldom visited

[1]Henry Wilson, *A memorial to the late J D Sedding* (London, 1892)
[2]Jane Thomas, 'Evolution of a practice', in *Basil Spence Architect*, ed. by Philip Long & Jane Thomas (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2007), pp.22-23
[3]Scotland had long and well established links with Bombay through business, missionary work and education. Missionary links are discussed in William Taylor, *Mission to Educate: A history of the educational work of the Scottish Presbyterian Mission in East Nigeria 1846-1960* (n.p.: Brill, 1996); Business links are discussed in Sandip Hazareesingh, *Chasing Commodities all Over the Surface of the Globe: Shipping, port development and the making of networks*

homeland and the Scottish community in which Spence lived was 'steeped in abstract nostalgia' for their roots.[4] Spence recalled hearing from the age of seven that Edinburgh was 'the most beautiful city in the world […] the legend of Edinburgh was firmly upheld by the Scottish families there'.[5]

This was not simply a romantic remembrance, formed through distance, time and oral history, but closely reflected perceptions of the city nurtured by the Scots or Celtic Renascence (sic) of the late 19th century. In Patrick Geddes publication *The Book of Spring. The Evergreen: A Northern Seasonal* (1895), while Geddes described old Edinburgh as 'the most dense and dire confusion of material and human wreck and misery in Europe', William Macdonald and J Arthur Thomson could also write of the city as 'unique in the world […] paved with history, echoing with romance, rich in an unbroken intellectual tradition'.[6]

That intellectual tradition had been taken to Bombay by missionaries of the Scottish Presbyterian Church and, for the expatriate community, the Bombay Scottish Education Society was seen as maintaining a continued connection with the homeland.[7] Spence duly attended the John Connon School, set up under the auspices of the Society.[8]

The school was in the old Fort area of the city, at its business, administrative and academic heart. Bombay's population had reached one million people in 1907 and the wide streets, lush parks and architectural

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between Glasgow and Bombay, c1850-1880 (OU, 2007) www.open.ac.uk/Arts/ferguson-centre/commodities-of-empire/working-papers.WP01.pdf [accessed 18 October 2008]

[4]Thomas in Long & Thomas (2007), p.23

[5]Ibid., p.23

[6]Patrick Geddes, 'The Scots Renascence', in *The Book of Spring. The Evergreen; A Northern Seasonal* (Edinburgh: Patrick Geddes, 1895), p.135; also William Macdonald and J Arthur Thomson 'Proem (sic)' in the same volume, p.14; Geddes went to India in 1914 with a travelling 'City and Town Planning Exhibition'. In 1919 he became Professor of Bombay University's new Department of Sociology and Civics. Prashant Kidambi, *The Making of an Indian Metropolis: Colonial governance and public culture in Bombay 1890-1920* (n.p.: Ashgate, 2007), p.3

[7]Taylor (1996), pp.8-11

[8]'Basil Urwin Spence Architect Biography Report', *Dictionary of Scottish Architects* (DSA), http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=203352 [accessed 25 September 2008]

grandeur of the Fort area, contrasted sharply with the city's slums to the north. While living conditions for the European residents largely protected them from the worst effects of monsoon failures and associated epidemics, disease was endemic in the slums and the city's worst outbreak of bubonic plague, which had begun in 1895, was still running its course.

Apart from the social contrasts between the colonial residents and the native inhabitants, Bombay was a city of great architectural variety and contrast. The John Connon School, on the main Esplanade Road, was a relatively small, but impressive, Gothic Revival building with tiered arcades and rich structural polychromy and it was surrounded by examples of 'Britain's finest heritage of High Victorian Gothic architecture'.[9]

To the east of the school was the massive Doric grandeur of the Town Hall and to the west the colossal High Court building, in an Early English Gothic style, its rich blue basalt contrasting with the red tiled roof. Beyond that were Sir George Gilbert Scott's magnificent University buildings: the Library with its Venetian arcaded galleries, the Rajabai Tower and the early French style of the Convocation Hall. To the north of the school was the Indo-Saracenic architecture of the General Post Office, and beyond that the glorious exuberance of the huge Victoria Terminus station, which brought together Venetian Gothic and Indo-Saracenic styles in a 'riotous extravaganza of polychromatic stone, decorated tile, marble and stained glass'.[10]

In contrast to this imposing State architecture was the no less impressive vernacular tradition of Bombay, characterised by colour and decoration, the tiered jettying of buildings and deeply overhanging cornices or chujjahs, which

[9]Philip Davies, *Splendours of the Raj: British Architecture in India, 1660-1947* (London: Murray, 1985), p.156
[10] Davies (1985) p.172: Davies discusses the architecture of Bombay in Chapter 7, 'Bombay: Urbs Prima in Indis', pp.147-182

provided shade for the rooms below. Spence believed that it was vitally important in architectural design, particularly within a city, to consider 'how the building greets the sky […] we have so many grey days. This makes a silhouette terribly important'.[11] Anthony Blee also recalled him being 'very concerned with […] the diversity of the silhouette' in the design of the Home Office building, Queen Anne's Gate, London.[12] This recognition of the importance of skyline and outline must have had its roots in the interest, variety and complexity of Bombay's skylines. It is possible to see references to Bombay's silhouetted forms and vernacular architecture in the tiered profile of Spence's Rome Embassy, while the projecting upper stories of the Queen Anne's Gate, Home Office buildings, London, echo the rhythm and outline of the much smaller Admiralty House, Apollo Street, Bombay.

Spence was awarded his first prize for drawing while in Bombay and, for a child with an artistic eye, the ebullience, colour, variety and sheer scale of the city's buildings must have been inspiring.[13] Beyond the calm open spaces of the Fort area lay a very different world of colour and contrast in the Crawford Markets and the native bazaars, with their crowds and noise. As Edwin Arnold described it in 1886:

> A tide of seething Asiatic humanity ebbs and flows up and down the Bhendi bazaar […] Nowhere could be seen a play of livelier hues, a busier and brighter city life. Besides the endless crowds of […] people coming and going between rows of grotesquely painted houses and temples, there are to be studied here specimens of every race and nation of the East.[14]

There was also the spectacle and theatricality of the annual Moslem Muharram celebrations, with colourfully decorated *tabuts,* bamboo and paper

[11] RIBA Library, Sir Basil Urwin Spence Biographical File – unsourced news cutting.
[12] Ian Rice, 'QAG – Sir Basil Spence's controversial Home Office building' in *Twentieth Century Society Newsletter* (Autumn 2004), p.10
[13] David Pryce-Jones, 'Pillar of Architecture', *Sunday Telegraph Magazine,* 28 September 1973
[14] Edwin Arnold, *India Revisited* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1886) p.55

replicas of Imam Husain's tomb, carried in procession through the streets. It was described as 'a carnival […] the like of which for extent and eccentricity, is to be found in few other cities in the world' and, although by the late 1890s Muharram had become a spark for public disorder, it is possible that Spence may have witnessed the spectacle.[15]

In his account of Bombay, Arnold frequently referred to the colours of the city: 'this play of keen colours'; 'avenues of red, blue or saffron-hued houses'; 'dresses of every conceivable hue, rose colour, amber, purple, silver, gold, azure, white, green and crimson'.[16] Without doubt this extraordinary vibrancy left its mark on Spence. His fondness for bringing colour into his architecture (a trait which did not always find favour with the users of his buildings) was clearly 'a recognition of the sights of his childhood'.[17]

His early years in Bombay must also have helped to lay the foundations of his fondness for strongly modelled architectural form, and his keen appreciation and understanding of the vital part played by light and cast shadow in the creation of an architectural statement: 'objects are revealed by light so it is of vital importance what kind of light hits an object, its intensity and its direction'.[18] His experience in India may also be at the root of his exceptional ability to capture differing qualities of light and atmosphere in his architectural drawings, from the clear, intense Mediterranean light in his perspective of the Rome

[15] *Times of India,* 1 November 1884, cited in Prashant Kidambi (2007), p.124 & 140
[16] Arnold (1886), p.56, 57 & 61
[17] Gillian Blee, 'Living with Spence', in Long & Thomas (2007), p.13; Spence's use of colour at the Laleham Road housing estate, Shepperton, Middlesex, earned the estate the nicknames 'Rainbow Corner' and 'Tin Pan Alley': *Thames and Twickenham Times,* 26 October 1949. The council planted quick growing climbers 'to tone down the colour scheme' (*Evening Standard,* 17 August 1951.
[18] RCAHMS MS 2329/X/19/16/119 Undated letter [1965?] Spence to M Matthews enclosing a note for inclusion in a domestic lighting exhibition catalogue.

Embassy (see Figure 3), to the cold light of a dour Edinburgh day in his pastel drawing of the Southern Motors Garage, Causewayside (see Figure 4).[19]

How the outbreak of the First World War affected Spence's life in Bombay is not clear, but there was growing political unrest and the country's war effort left it near bankruptcy. Although 1918 brought an end to the war, influenza reached Bombay in June of that year, the monsoon failed and there were food shortages across India.[20] Even for European residents, conditions must have been difficult.

In September 1918 Spence attended the John Connon School for the last time and then travelled with his mother to Ootacamund, a hill station in the Nilgiri Hills, some 600 miles south of Bombay.[21] An article about Spence written in 1973 noted that he had memories of 'Ooti' and, 'in particular, Breeks School'.[22] Breeks served missionary and civil service families, mostly from the Madras area. The climate of the Nilgiri Hills was very similar to that of Britain and many children were sent to Ootacamund as preparation for moving to England to complete their education; this might explain Spence's attendance there. The coincidence of his departure from Bombay with the recurrence of influenza in the city suggests that health fears may offer another reason for his move south, however, the school records show that he spent just two weeks at the school and was withdrawn on 1st November 1918.[23]

Spence and his mother returned to Bombay, but early in 1919 the whole family left the city for Scotland, where the boys were to attend one of the

[19] RCAHMS: DP 010913 Perspective drawing of the British Embassy Rome; SC357577 Southern Motors Garage, Causewayside, Edinburgh, 1933
[20] J D Tomlinson, 'The First World War and British Cotton Piece Exports to India', *The Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 32, No. 4 (November 1979), p.501 http://www.jstor.org [accessed 20/1//08]
[21] Breeks Memorial School, Admissions' Register, records Spence last attending John Canon (sic) School on 13th September 1918 and being admitted to Breeks on 19th October 1918 (information from Alastair Reid, Principal, Hebron School, Ootacamund, Tamil Nadu)
[22] Pryce-Jones, *The Sunday Telegraph Magazine,* 28 September 1973.
[23] Breeks Memorial School, Admissions' Register, 1918.

country's finest schools, George Watson's College, Edinburgh.[24] Departing from Bombay in January, aboard the 'SS Nagoya', the Spences arrived in Plymouth on the 7th February.[25]

2.1b. Edinburgh, 1919-1931.

Swapping Bombay for the cold granite streets of Edinburgh must have been a very difficult experience for Spence. He had visited Britain as a very young child, probably arriving in the country in 1910. His brother Gerald's birth was registered in Paddington in that year and the family travelled back to Bombay in March 1911.[1] At the age of four, however, Spence cannot have formed much of an impression of the country and the effect of leaving the certainties of his life in India, for a strange land and school, must have been profound. As Spence's daughter Gillian Blee writes:

> One can only imagine how difficult the change must have been for him, […] travelling […] to a country completely different from all that he had known, exchanging the incandescent Indian light and colour for the grey stone and silver light of the Scottish capital.[2]

Perhaps the complex nature of Spence's character, the curious mix of self-sufficiency and dependency, confidence and vulnerability, and the remarkable drive and determination which marked his career, can be traced back to this event.

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[24]Spence won a scholarship to attend George Watson's College, his brother Gerald, however, attended the school for only a short time before money ran out and he left to join the Bank of Scotland: information from Robin Spence, son of Gerald, interviewed by Dr Louise Campbell, 27 February 2007.

[25]Board of Trade: Inwards Passenger Lists: National Archives of the United Kingdom Series BT26; Piece: 659; Item: 114. UK Incoming Passenger Lists 1878-1960 http://www.ancestry.co.uk [accessed 23 October 2008]

[1]England and Wales Birth Index: 1837-1983: Births Jul-Aug-Sep 1910, Vol.1a, page 74a. http://ancestry.co.uk [accessed 10 December 2008]; Outgoing Passenger Lists http://www.findmypast.com [accessed 21 November 2008]: The Spence family travelled from London to Bombay aboard the SS Arabia on 31 March 1911. The children's names are not given, but the youngest is noted as being under one year old.

[2]Gillian Blee in Long & Thomas (2007), p.13

Although Spence would become the public face of British architecture, it was never possible to fit him easily into an architectural category. There was never a clearly discernible 'Spence style', he never openly aligned himself with architectural movements or political viewpoints on architecture, and did not enter into any of the major social and theoretical debates of the pre and post-war period. Although he held academic posts, it is not possible to see Spence shaping architectural education and thought and, while former members of the practice readily acknowledge their debt to him, it is difficult to point to the architectural legacy of Spence in their work. Spence has been described as the 'archetypal maverick, always an outsider; an Indian in Scotland, a Scot in England and an Englishman abroad', and it is tempting to see that sense of dislocation starting with his move to Scotland.[3]

Spence and his brother took their places at George Watson's with the added burden of knowing that their parents would eventually return to Bombay. While Urwin and Daisy do not appear to feature on passenger lists between 1919 and 1921, they are clearly recorded as departing for Karachi in early December 1921 and returning to Liverpool in April 1923.[4] It appears that Daisy then remained in Scotland and Urwin travelled back to Bombay, returning permanently to Britain in 1929.[5]

Brian Edwards notes Spence's time at George Watson's as being 'undistinguished'.[6] His artistic talent, however, was recognized and encouraged

[3] Brian Edwards, 'Spence's education and training', paper given at 'Spence and Scotland' symposium 7 May 2008, held at Edinburgh College of Art.
[4]Spence's parents departed from Liverpool, on 14 December 1921, aboard the 'SS City of London', information from Outgoing Passenger Lists http://www.findmypast.com [accessed 21 November 2008]; They returned to Liverpool on 20 April 1923, aboard the 'SS City of Nagpur', information from Inwards Passenger Lists: National Archives of the United Kingdom Series BT26; Piece: 743; Item: 53. UK Incoming Passenger Lists 1878-1960 http://www.ancestry.co.uk [accessed 23 October 2008]
[5]Spence's father became ill in 1927 while in Bombay. Mrs Spence travelled out to India in 1928 to accompany him back to Britain. (See note 165)
[6]Brian Edwards, *Basil Spence 1907-1976* (Edinburgh: Rutland Press, 1995), p.14

by his art teacher Ralph Hay.[7] He won the school's art prize, had lino and woodcuts published in the school magazine and his leaver's report made note of his drawing ability.[8] Spence recalled, 'nobody else got the art prize at so early an age as me. […] The art master wanted me to be a painter. And sculpture too. Carrick paid me the compliment of saying that I should be a sculptor'.[9]

It was clearly a natural progression for him to enrol at the Edinburgh College of Art (ECA) and in September 1925 he joined the general foundation year. Although in interview he said that he knew at the age of 16 that he wanted to be an architect, he began at ECA with the intention of studying sculpture.[10] It was at the end of his first year that he chose to move to the School of Architecture.[11] The head of the school, John Begg, had been consulting architect to the Government of Bombay, from 1901-1907, and as such had been responsible for the Indo-Saracenic design of the General Post-Office, a building with which Spence would have been familiar.[12]

Spence's six years at ECA would have a profound effect upon his approach to art and architecture, and on his working methods. It is necessary, therefore, to understand the traditions of the College and the various aspects which formed its distinctive ethos.

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[7]Clive Fenton, 'First buildings 1932-9: Arts and Crafts to Modernism' in Long & Thomas (2007), p.35

[8] In 1919, Spence's lino-cut "The Lady April" was published in the school's magazine, *The Watsonian*: Edwards (2008 Symposium); Brian Edwards, 'Spence, Sir Basil Urwin (1907-1976)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (*ODNB*) (Oxford University Press, 2004), http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31707 [accessed 23 September 2005]

[9]Pryce-Jones, *Sunday Telegraph Magazine,* 28 September 1973

[10]Ibid.

[11]Philip Long, 'The architect and the artists', Long & Thomas (2007) p.105

[12]Begg's General Post-Office building was the first example of Indo-Saracenic architecture in Bombay. In 1907 he was appointed Consulting Architect to the Government of India. He returned to Scotland in 1921 and became Head of the ECA School of Architecture, a position which he held from 1922-1933: *DSA* http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=200375 [accessed 10 October 2008]

The Edinburgh College of Art was founded in 1906. Until that point art instruction in Edinburgh had been provided through the School of Art at the Heriot-Watt College, the Royal Scottish Academy (RSA) and the more recent School of Applied Arts which opened in 1892.[13] The architect Robert Rowand Anderson had long argued that there needed to be a more coordinated approach to the teaching of architecture, arts and crafts. He ‘believed in the central place of architecture within culture’ and felt that architecture was not accorded its rightful place, particularly within the RSA.[14]

He was instrumental in setting up the School of Applied Arts to provide integrated teaching across the various fields of study. It was intended to train architects and others in 'the constructive trades’, and its courses were structured to bring together the different disciplines, ensuring that students actively worked together, rather than simply mixing at a social level.[15]

The ethos of the School reinforced notions of a distinctly Scottish heritage, both artistically and in quality of design, and it strove to shape a 'national character because there is in Scotland an art of the past with a distinctly local colouring capable of being developed and applied to the wants and necessities of the present day’.[16] Throughout the school students not only learned about contemporary craftsmanship, but also about craft and building history. This historical perspective gave them a deep understanding of their Scottish design and craft heritage, but also ensured that they saw their work as part of a continuum, imbibing throughout their training a ‘sense of being a living part of history’.[17]

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[13]Elizabeth Cumming, *Hand, Heart and Soul: The Arts and Crafts Movement in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2006), pp.43-44
[14]Ibid., p.43: Rowand Anderson resigned from the RSA in 1883 because of its ‘neglect of architecture’.
[15]Ibid., p.45
[16]Ibid., p.45 and note 53.
[17]Ibid., p.45

Another important, but short-lived school, which '[took] forward ideas of Celticity' and taught students within the premise that 'past, present and future were inseparable', was the Old Edinburgh School of Art.[18] Founded by Patrick Geddes and John Duncan, it also opened in 1892, but was active for only eight years.

The new Edinburgh College of Art finally brought together the various sources of instruction, providing a fully integrated approach to art, architecture and craft training. Work began on J Dick Peddie and G W Browne's new college building in 1907; it opened to students in 1908 and was completed in 1911. The building was very different in character to the Glasgow School of Art, completed nine years earlier. Edinburgh had a long tradition of neo-classical architectural design and the ECA followed in the lineage of William Playfair's 'classical "temples" of education' in the City.[19] Edinburgh still had a strong 'desire to embody the Antique' in its architecture, and particular care was taken in the design of the college's Entrance Hall and the Sculpture Court, the two main public spaces of the building.[20] The latter was designed to display the college's remarkable collection of casts of antique sculpture, a collection which encapsulated the city's cultural and educational aspirations.

Despite the building's neo-classical character, the ECA combined the Arts and Crafts ideals of the School of Applied Art, with a strong sense of the importance of Scottishness and Scottish traditions: the 'Celticity' of Geddes and Duncan. Much of its schedule was drawn up by Rowand Anderson and the sculptor James Pittendrigh Macgillivray.[21] Geddes's philosophy, his 'spirit of

[18]Ibid., p.40
[19]Margaret Stewart, 'Design of the main building' in 'History of ECA' www.eca.ac.uk/index.php?id=799 [accessed 2 September 2008]; Playfair's buildings included the Royal Scottish Institute (now the Royal Scottish Academy), the National Gallery of Scotland, the Royal College of Surgeons and the South Bridge buildings of Edinburgh University.
[20]Margaret Stewart, Ibid.
[21]Cumming (2006), p.46

historically based renewal and his concept of Edinburgh as an exemplary or microcosmic city', would be brought more directly to ECA through his son-in-law Frank Mears, who lectured there in the mid 1920s.[22]

Fundamental to all disciplines throughout the four schools of architecture, painting, sculpture and design was the cultivation of an appreciation of materials, workmanship and design history. This was learned through practical engagement rather than purely academic understanding. There was a pronounced emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration and integration of the fine and applied arts, with sculpture seen as the linking discipline between the two.[23] The college's first principal, Frank Morley Fletcher, viewed the mixing of artisans, artists and architects as 'an excellent influence on the art student, since it ensures and maintains a practical standard of workmanship'.[24] Nevertheless, although collaboration was considered an essential component of the learning process, a central tenet of the Scottish educational system was the need to respect and encourage individual potential and creativity, and this remained of paramount importance.

Students were immersed in the history of their crafts, not in order to provide templates from which to copy, but to provide the intellectual basis from which new ideas could grow and mature. As Rowand Anderson had written in 1889, designers had to be 'untrammelled by worn-out traditions but utilising all that is good and of universal truth in the past'.[25] A similar view was expressed by Francis Newbery, Director of the Glasgow School of Art, who believed the students should learn about tradition, but then 'straightway forget all but the

[22]Miles Glendinning, *Modern Architect: The life and times of Robert Matthew*, (London: RIBA, 2008), p.27
[23]Edwards (2008 Symposium)
[24]Frank Morley Fletcher in Charles Holmes (ed.) *A review of the work executed by students in the leading art schools of Great Britain and Ireland* (London: n.pub., 1916), pp.122-24; Morley Fletcher introduced a new Crafts section to the College in 1910.
[25]Cumming (2006), p.211

spirit of it. For the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life'.[26] His wife, the artist Jessie Newbery, spoke of the designer as 'being the sum of tradition'.[27]

Spence quickly and readily absorbed the ECA's central tenets and they influenced the whole of his professional career. He always believed that contemporary design represented 'the sum of tradition' and that artistic development was evolutionary rather than revolutionary. In *Phoenix at Coventry* he wrote that 'architecture should grow out of the conditions of the time, should not be a copy of past styles, and must be a clear expression of beliefs in contemporary thought […] it is the duty of the architect not to copy, but to think afresh.[28]

He believed that such fresh thinking was not revolutionary, but instead marked out the true traditionalist: 'one has to design afresh and with vitality if one wants to be a traditionalist':[29]

> Many sincere people, little realizing that our tradition is such an adventurous one, are shocked when architects think in this traditional way; they cannot see that the true traditionalists are people who think simply in their own era. The copyists, then, are surely the revolutionaries.[30]

In an interview in 1957 Spence said that, while 'we all like to think we are artists', he considered himself 'essentially a workman'.[31] His work always exhibited the keen awareness of craftsmanship and materials fostered by ECA, but the foundations of this deep appreciation probably lay in his earlier experience in Bombay, where he had been surrounded by architecture, materials and craftsmanship of the finest quality. He also retained a lasting

[26]F H Newbery, 'Tradition', *The Vista: The Quarterly Magazine of the Glasgow School of Architecture Club* Vol.1, No.1 (May 1908), p.4
[27]Gleeson White, 'Some Glasgow Designers and Their Work. III', *The Studio* Vol.12, (London; Cory Adams & Mackay,1897), p.48
[28]Basil Spence, *Phoenix at Coventry*, (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962), p.8
[29]'The Coventry Church of St Michael, Coventry', *RIBAJ* (February 1955), p.145
[30]Basil Spence (1962), p.9
[31]Tom Baistow, 'The sweet smell of success', *News Chronicle,* 7 August 1957.

appreciation of the important contribution which other artistic disciplines could make to architecture. Once again, this view was fostered by teaching at the ECA, but may also have had its earliest roots in Bombay and the exuberant architecture which formed the backdrop to his everyday life.

Spence was 'absolutely of the opinion […] that the three artists – the architect, the painter and the sculptor – should go hand in hand from the earliest possible moment'. This ideal partnership, however, seldom found full expression in his work.[32] He viewed architecture as 'the mother art', in that it traditionally 'brought together almost all the arts'. This hierarchical view, combined with the nature of architectural patronage and his strongly individualistic approach to design, meant that while artistic partnership might be possible within his projects, 'hand in hand' collaboration rarely materialized.[33] Spence always retained control, orchestrating and conducting any artistic contributions to projects.

Alongside collaborative work, drawing formed the other core element of courses at the ECA. Drawing, particularly freehand sketching, was seen as fundamental to the cultivation of a student's imagination regardless of their field of study. It provided an essential tool for the development and detailing of their ideas and helped them towards an easy facility with matters of line and scale. Spence readily absorbed all he was taught and excelled at the discipline. The architect Sir Robert Matthew (in the year above Spence at ECA) recalled 'the breathtaking sketches which came so easily from his pencil and brush - the envy of us all!'[34] Another contemporary, Robert Scott Morton, described Spence as 'very much the artist, temperamental, brilliant, a bit of a show off'.[35]

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[32]'Architecture and the other arts', a discussion held at the RIBA on 7 January 1958. *RIBAJ,* February 1958, p.117
[33]Ibid.
[34]Glendinning (2008), p.32
[35]Ibid.

The exercise of the *esquisse*, in the tradition of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, was used to encourage and hone the student's ability to rapidly assimilate and organise the requirements of a design brief and produce a swift, but considered, resolution of the scheme.[36] It was an opportunity for the student to exercise their own judgement, imagination and 'selective ability' and they were expected to complete the *esquisse* in a day, producing a rendered sketch scheme which showed their overall concept and contained the essential elements of the solution proposed.[37] This could then be taken and developed into a more detailed scheme if required.

Spence excelled at this discipline, his natural freehand drawing talent and an innate sense of form, volume and light, allowed him to quickly visualise concepts in two and three-dimensional form and express them on paper. An example is his 'Entrance to a Grand Shipping Company' (see Figure 5). Architect David Rock, who worked for Spence, recalls him taking new design briefs away for a weekend and returning after two or three days with plans and elevations and a beautifully rendered sketch perspective, which would then often go into the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition.[38]

Throughout his career Spence utilised this *esquisse*-based approach to produce initial design concepts. The ability to assess the brief and produce a rapid but considered response, allowed Spence to gain client approval quickly. He then tended to remain stubbornly faithful to the original concept, thus retaining the purity and freshness of his initial idea. The fact that the original

[36]A detailed description of the *esquisse* exercise, as practised at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts after World War I, is given in Jean Paul Carlhian, 'The Ecole des Beaux-Arts Modes and Manners', *Journal of Architectural Education* Vol. 33, No.2 (November 1979) (Blackwell Publishing on behalf of ACSAI), p.10 http://www.jstor.org/stable/1424347 [accessed 15 October 2008]
[37]Ibid., p.10; *Esquisse* exercises at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts had to be completed by the student in isolation, *en loge,* within twelve hours of the task being set. The resulting document was considered 'to constitute a guarantee of the originality and genuineness of his idea against any outside influence'.
[38]David Rock interview with the author 9 January 2008

concept seldom underwent major changes, as the proposals passed through the more detailed design stages, is testament to the depth of understanding which Spence was able to bring to bear from the outset and also of his ability to understand and translate the needs of the client.

While the ethos of the ECA had a profound and lasting effect on Spence, Edwards sees the physical surroundings of the ECA as providing an equally important formative influence. The principal space for students was the sculpture court, around the perimeter of which were ranged the studios. Peddie and Browne modelled the design of the court on a double-cube room illustrated by Palladio in *I Quattro Libri dell´Architettura* (1570). Palladio's design gained its authority from the use of harmonic Greek proportions and the architects clearly 'intended that the spirit of Greek architecture should be the setting for the cast collection'.[39] It was also intended that the sculptures should be displayed in an authentic manner and in an architectural context as close as possible to the original.[40] To this end the court was top-lit and the sculptures were seen in reflected rather than direct light.[41]

This impressive space formed the fulcrum of college life, it acted as a collaborative area where the many different disciplines could meet and it also hosted the end of term celebration, known as the Revel, during which the sculpture court would be decorated by the students. Edwards believes that this may have been where Spence first learned the skills of creating a quick impression, a facility which made him such a successful exhibition designer.[42]

Spence always cited the Parthenon as the zenith of perfect architectural expression, believing that 'Greek architecture stands for perfection …

[39]Margaret Stewart, 'Design of the main building' in 'History of ECA' www.eca.ac.uk/index.php?id=799 [accessed 2 September 2008]
[40]Ibid., the Parthenon casts were set in their original sequence, at roughly the level at which they would have originally been seen.
[41]Ibid.
[42]Edwards (2008 Symposium)

Perfection of scale, material and workmanship'. [43] It is reasonable to assume that this deep respect for Greek architecture was nurtured during his studies at ECA and through his experience of the sculpture court. Once again though, the seeds of his appreciation may well have been sown in Bombay, where the towering Doric portico of the Town Hall made a powerful architectural statement.

The importance of light in Spence's perspective drawings, his keen appreciation of the way in which light modelled three-dimensional form, and his facility for creating space, atmosphere and incident through the use of light, were also probably strongly influenced by the sculpture court. Spence had intended to study sculpture and throughout his career his concern for materials, space and volume, and his keen awareness of spatial modelling, all came from a sculptor's eye. When talking about his design for the British Pavilion at the Montreal Expo '67 Exhibition, Spence said that he was interested in 'occupying and piercing space in much the same way as a sculptor'.[44]

While the physical surroundings at ECA impacted upon Spence, it is clear that they were honing an appreciation of architectural space and atmosphere that had been formed in Bombay. In *Phoenix at Coventry* he recalled being taken by his father to the caves at Elephanta, when he was eight years old. He could still evoke with clarity the space and atmosphere of the caves:

> This was the first architectural experience of my life and it is still vivid. The vast chambers carved out of solid rock, rich in sculpture and intricate detail, gave a tremendous feeling of size; the cool temperature inside contrasted with the heat outside, and the dim lighting revealed features of the interior only after the eye had got used to darkness.[45]

[43]Basil Spence, 'Inaugural Address of the President' given at the RIBA 4 November 1958, *RIBAJ,* December 1958, p.46.
[44]Brian Edwards, 'Spence at Expo '67:Modernism and the search for national identity'. Paper given at 'Architecture, diplomacy, and national identity: Sir Basil Spence and mid-century modernism', British School at Rome 3rd-5th December 2008.
[45]Basil Spence (1962), p.7

Spence had made an impressive start at ECA, and in 1926 was elected secretary of the Students' Association.[46] In addition to the industrious, sometimes 'busy, self absorbed and impatient' side of his character there was also a much lighter side.[47] He possessed 'child-like enthusiasm and vigour', 'vitality, warmth, fun' and 'enormous energy' and this side of his personality drew him into the social side of college life.[48] He and Matthew dressed as a pantomime horse for a student rag and when a new public toilet next to the Royal Scottish Academy caused offence, Spence joined Matthew and another student on a night time foray to daub the building with humorous graffiti.[49]

These episodes also highlight other important facets of Spence's personality: insecurity, ambition and an astute understanding of what he needed to do to succeed. Sir Hugh Casson described Spence as 'extremely vulnerable, deeply sensitive and curiously insecure'.[50] As Miles Glendinning notes, in his work on Robert Matthew:

> although Spence had been educated at George Watson's College, his Indian birth and family roots, and his Anglican rather than Presbyterian religious background, gave him an enigmatic character, less strongly anchored in Edinburgh Society than Matthew'.[51]

Donning a horse costume and painting graffiti enabled him to fit in, but such activities also allowed him to appear equal to the more dominant and charismatic Matthew, his only serious rival at ECA.

Despite Spence's remarkable talent and his enthusiastic entry into all aspects of college life, family finances meant that continuation of his studies was never a foregone conclusion. In an interview in 1965 he described his

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[46]Edwards (1995), p.14
[47] Richard Sheppard, Spence obituary *RIBAJ,* January 1977, p.40
[48]Richard England, 'Sir Basil Spence: an irreplaceable loss', *The Sunday Times of Malta,* 28 November 1976, p.23; Judy Hillman, 'The architect of controversy', *Guardian,* 20 November 1976, p.11; Frederick Gibberd, Obituary Sir Basil Spence, *AR,* April 1977, p.254
[49]Glendinning (2008), p.32 & 38
[50]Hillman, *Guardian,* 20 November 1976, p.11
[51]Glendinning (2008), p.32

parents as being 'very poor', and said that although his mother, having 'saved up sufficient', was able to cover his first year at ECA, beyond that 'I was on my own'.[52] An earlier interview, however, noted that 'his father […] could only afford to pay for one year at Edinburgh'.[53] Whatever the truth of the matter, finances were clearly of great concern to him and throughout his time at ECA his drive to win prizes and awards was partly motivated by ambition but also, more pragmatically, by the need to finance his studies.

1927 has been recorded as the year in which Spence's father died and particular financial hardship hit the family.[54] Research has revealed, however, that Daisy was not in fact widowed until 1934; Urwin Spence died in Portobello, Edinburgh, on the 27th December 1934, and it was Spence himself who registered the death.[55]

An interview with Spence, in 1973, noted that Urwin died from the tropical disease sprue.[56] One of the disease's symptoms is pernicious anaemia and this is cited as the cause of death in his entry in the Register of Deaths. While Urwin did not die in 1927, this may have been when he contracted the disease and he could certainly have suffered from it for the rest of his life.[57] It would rapidly have rendered him unable to work leading to a severe financial crisis for the family. Medical advice recommended removal of the sufferer to Europe as soon their condition stabilised; it also recommended that the patient never returned to

[52]John Donat, 'Sir Basil Spence on his work', *The Listener,* 2 January 1965; The position of Assayer was not highly paid and does not appear in *The India List and India Office List*. The 1905 edition of this publication lists only those Indian Civil Service positions earning more than the equivalent of £425 per annum.
[53]Baistow, *News Chronicle,* 7 August 1956.
[54]Edwards *ODNB* (2004); Thomas in Long and Thomas (2007), p.23
[55] Register of deaths for the district of Portobello, Edinburgh, 1934. Statutory Deaths 685/08 0205. http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk [accessed 21 November 2008]
[56]Pryce-Jones, *Sunday Telegraph Magazine,* 28 September 1973.
[57]Tropical sprue is a progressive, debilitating and exceedingly unpleasant illness, both for patient and family. Treatment was possible in the late 1920s, however, unless it was carried out properly the prognosis was invariably fatal and 'cases may linger for years'. Tropical sprue is detailed in Patrick Manson, *Tropical diseases: A manual of the diseases of warm climates*, 6th edition (London: Cassel, 1919), pp.549-567

tropical climes.[58] Urwin could not have made the voyage back to England unassisted and this is the most probable explanation for Daisy's journey to Bombay in October 1928. She spent a relatively short time in the city before accompanying her husband back to Britain early in 1929.[59]

Even for someone as determined and able as Spence, the crisis put his studies in serious jeopardy. The college, however, was well aware that his rare talent had to be nurtured and awarded a maintenance bursary of £40, 'in recognition of the unusual brilliance of his first year's work', which enabled him to continue his studies.[60]

The architectural course at ECA was not taught entirely within the college. Students studied drawing, architectural history, design, colour and sculpture there, but learned about mechanics, materials and construction at Heriot Watt College. For a student with a strong artistic bias, this distinct separation between art and design, and technology and building was not beneficial to a balanced development of skills and, although Spence amassed distinctions in freehand drawing, colour and design, with marks of 100% in each, he attained only 68% in building construction.[61]

In 1929 he received his College Certificate in Architecture and thereby exemption from the RIBA's Intermediate Examination.[62] He also won the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS) prize for third year students. During the previous year he had travelled around England with fellow student

[58] Manson (1919), p.565 & 567
[59] Daisy Spence left Liverpool, on October 17 1928, aboard the 'SS City of Paris', information from Outgoing Passenger Lists http://www.findmypast.com [accessed 21 November 2008]; Mr and Mrs Spence returned to Plymouth on January 10 1929 having travelled from Karachi aboard the 'SS City of Canterbury', information from Incoming Passenger Lists http://ancestry.co.uk [accessed 21 November 2008]
[60] Thomas in Long & Thomas (2007), p.23
[61] Edwards (2008 Symposium). In 1935 the RIBA expressed concerns about the teaching of technology on the architectural course.
[62] Edwards (2004); In 1925 ECA's School of Architecture became the first Scottish architectural school to gain RIBA recognition for its Certificate course and thereby exemption from the RIBA's Intermediate examinations for successful students. By the time Spence completed his studies, the college had also gained recognition for its Diploma course.

Kenneth Begg, son of the Head of Architecture at ECA.[63] This friendship now stood him in good stead as he looked for an office placement.

He and fellow student William Kininmonth had decided to seek work placements in London. With 'only £10 in the world' Spence intended to find a position in the offices of Sir John Burnet or Sir Edwin Lutyens, but he found instead that getting a placement was not easy.[64] It was Begg who gained a place with Lutyens and then secured places there for Spence and Kininmonth.

Spence clearly relished his time there, although he claimed to have lived on bread and tomato ketchup.[65] He described it as 'experiencing one of the great privileges that could be afforded to any architect: that is to work with a genius.'[66] Lutyens was engaged at that time on New Delhi and had set up a separate office for the project; it was here that Spence, Begg and Kininmonth worked, Spence producing furniture details and drawings for garden designs for the Viceroy's House. Spence's approach to design was clearly influenced by his time in Lutyens' office and he readily described Lutyens as his 'patron and master'.[67] In the evenings he continued his architectural studies at the Bartlett, attending classes under the tutelage of Professor Albert Richardson. The year was not all work though and Spence met his future wife, Mary Joan Ferris, through their shared love of badminton. They clearly made a formidable couple from the outset, rising to championship status in mixed doubles, and that strong partnership continue throughout their marriage.[68]

Spence and Kininmonth returned to Edinburgh in 1930, where Spence continued to gain prestigious prizes for his work, being awarded the RIAS Rowand Anderson Medal in 1930.

[63]Fenton in Long & Thomas (2007), p.35
[64]Pryce-Jones, *Sunday Telegraph Magazine,* 28 September 1973.
[65]"Pendennis", 'Table Talk - St. Basil', *Observer,* 11 May 1958, p.3
[66]Basil Spence, 'Address to Students by the President', *RIBAJ,* March 1959 p.152
[67]Spence (1962), p.13
[68]Edwards (2004), p.17

Spence's time in London had coincided with a change in the teaching staff at ECA; E A A Rowse and John Summerson joined the College following the retirement of C D Carus-Wilson.[69] Rowse would spend five years at ECA, Summerson only a year, but their presence 'immediately began to swing the orientation of the school towards a subtly Modernist ethos, reviving it […] from "a long winter's lethargy"'.[70] Walter Gropius was invited to lecture there in 1929 and Erich Mendelsohn visited in 1930.[71]

Mark Girouard suggests that Summerson made 'little mark' at the College during his year there; however, an article written by Summerson in 1930 illustrates something of the clarity, eloquence and enthusiasm with which he must have introduced Modernism to his students.[72] His belief that 'the Edinburgh of the future, a glittering spectacle of steel, glass, and concrete' was 'by no means unimaginable', must have startled his Edinburgh audience, but it was simply indicative of how deeply he believed in Modernism as 'no ephemeral "phase," […] but […] a vital thread in the weft of modern civilisation'.[73] In his praise for the 'primitive, cliff-like grandeur' of a grain-elevator at Leith and his delight in the 'particularly captivating' line of the stairs of Edinburgh's buses, the enthusiasm which must have suffused his lectures is very evident.[74]

Summerson's advocacy of the aesthetics of Modernism: 'ultimate beauty under the sure guidance of geometrical form and the inspiration of scientific engineering', was complemented by Rowse's advocacy of a Modernist

[69]Glendinning (2008) p.36
[70]Ibid., p.36
[71]Edwards (2004)
[72]Mark Girouard, 'Summerson, Sir John Newenham (1904–1992)', *ODNB*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2006 http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/47466 [accessed 7 Jan 2009]
[73]John Summerson, 'Modernity in Architecture: An appeal for the new style', *The Scotsman,* 21 February 1930, p.8
[74]Ibid.

approach to the design and planning process.[75] Described as 'impervious to conventional thinking', Rowse brought a very non Beaux-Arts approach to architectural education: design development based on scientific methodology and sociological research, 'merging Taylorist efficiency and Geddesian humanism'.[76]

While in London, Spence had read Le Corbusier's *Towards a New Architecture*. The book was apparently seen as 'subversive literature' in Lutyens's office, but Spence recalled being 'greatly influenced by its contemporary philosophy'.[77] On his return to Edinburgh he would have been aware of the College's shift towards Modernism.[78]

Summerson's design theory lectures would almost certainly have left their impression on Spence. Nevertheless, it is likely that the latter's keen eye, love of form and natural assimilation of ideas would have naturally led to an engagement with the Modernist aesthetic, as evidenced in early projects such as Southern Motors, Causewayside, and Dr King's House, Easter Belmont Road, both in Edinburgh. Experimenting with the aesthetic, however, was a very different matter to adopting the underlying Modernist methodology advocated by Rowse and while Rowse's influence on Robert Matthew was profound and far-reaching, Spence's character and approach to design did not lend themselves to the same architectural philosophy.

Geddesian principles were not new to architectural students at ECA. They had suffused the architectural history and city planning lectures of Frank Mears

[75]Ibid.
[76]Elizabeth Darling, *Re-forming Britain: narratives of modernity before reconstruction*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), p.185; Glendinning (2008), p.36; In 1932 Rowse set up Scotland's first department of civic design at ECA. In 1933 he was appointed Assistant Director at the AA, where he changed the course structure by introducing teaching by units, rather than year, replacing the Beaux-Arts emphasis on individual design and competition with group-working and research generated design development, see Darling (2007), pp.179-209
[77]Edwards (1995), p.29
[78]Ibid.

and there was a solid foundation for Rowse's advocacy of 'diagnostic survey as an essential precursor to planning action'.[79] While Glendinning describes Matthew internalising the philosophy, such that it was 'in the bloodstream from the start' and 'would virtually slip from his conscious awareness', Spence was less receptive.[80] His belief in evolutionary progress within architecture and the 'unity of past, present and future' was certainly that of Geddes, but Spence's method of working was to respond instinctively and emotionally to the brief, producing a swift pictorial conception, rather than allowing architectural character to emerge through a process of research and testing of alternative solutions.

It is not known to what extent Rowse encouraged group-working at ECA, but it was not a methodology which came naturally to Spence. While he was happy to collaborate and share ideas from a position of leadership, changing his working methods and subordinating his artistic and architectural independence to the ideas of the group would have been difficult if not impossible. He remained wedded to the concept of architecture as an individualistic and primarily visual discipline, rather than as a collaborative, social and political tool and, as architecture and politics became increasingly intertwined, Spence appears to have made a conscious decision to stand apart from the debate; in 1968 he wrote ‘I have always tried to keep out of politics – as it is very dangerous for an architect to align himself with any party in my experience’.[81]

Glendinning notes that the ‘driving social idealism’ which motivated Matthew ‘was entirely absent from Spence’s world outlook’.[82] In 1935 he

[79]Glendinning (2008), p.27
[80]Ibid., p.27
[81] RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/9/1-245 File relating to memberships and support of charities. Letter from Spence dated 14 May 1968. The letter accompanied a small donation to the New Forest Conservative Association; one of his few overtly political acts.
[82]Ibid., p.54

applied for the post of Assistant Architect for the Department of Health for Scotland, but having lost the position to Matthew he never again sought public employment.[83]

As architecture became increasingly reliant on science and technology, and moved towards pre-fabrication, standardisation and industrialised building, Spence's belief that the architect was first and foremost an artist also set him apart. Speaking in 1958, at an RIBA talk on 'The architect's role in society', Spence reaffirmed his long held belief in the art of architecture:

> I can well remember years ago in Edinburgh […] defending a motion that an architect was more of an artist than a constructor. I spoke for the motion because I believed in it. I believed that an architect should be an artist. If he is not an artist, then he should not call himself an architect. There are degrees of artistry, but even to question the necessity of beauty in practical things, I think is almost sacrilege.[84]

Spence's lack of involvement in, or alignment to, architectural, social and political debates, was taken by critics to indicate a lack of theoretical and intellectual rigour, however, while friends noted that his 'architectural attitudes seemed to spring from the heart rather than from the head', and that he was 'neither a scholar nor an abstract thinker', he was also seen to possess 'rare levels of eminent intellectual qualities'.[85] The writer of his *Times* obituary saw his lack of involvement in groups and movements not as anti-intellectualism, but perhaps the result of his being 'by instinct and in many of his attitudes, a man of the eighteenth rather than of the twentieth century'.[86] Lance Wright, editor of the *Architectural Review*, also saw him as a man out of his time, 'rather like a

[83] Ibid., p.54
[84] *RIBAJ,* April 1958, p.189
[85] Hugh Casson, 'The day Sir Basil fainted', *Observer,* 21 November 1976; Frederick Gibberd, 'Obituary Sir Basil Spence', *AR,* April 1977, p.254; *The Sunday Times of Malta,* 28 November 1976, p.23
[86] Obituary, *The Times,* 20 November 1976, p.14

Victorian who had strayed into the 20th century. He practised the art of architecture in an age when everyone thinks of it as a science'.[87]

Equally the great variety in his work was often taken as proof of his lack of intellectual rigour. John Donat found in Spence's work 'a curious lack of consistency and continuity, an almost eclectic variety, which lacks the stamp of individuality, of a personality'.[88] Spence disagreed with the word 'eclectic' and said that he was 'rather suspicious of people who try to put their own hallmark on everything' and was 'rather chary' about creating 'a hallmarked product that everyone can recognise'.[89]

In 1930, following Summerson's departure from ECA, Spence was appointed as a part-time junior drawing instructor, a move which recognised his unusual talent. He was also able to earn money producing presentation perspective drawings for practising architects such as Leslie Graham Thompson and Reginald Fairlie. Spence gained his diploma in 1931 and, as a final accolade, was presented with the RIBA's Silver Medal as the best architectural student in the UK. He continued to teach at ECA, but was now eager to begin professional practice.[90]

2.1c. Early career, 1931-1939.

The timing of Spence's entry into the professional market was not auspicious. The Depression was affecting all areas of employment and architectural design and construction had been badly hit. Assistants in both private and public

[87]'"Controversial genius" Sir Basil dies at 69', *Evening Standard,* 19 November 1976.
[88]'Sir Basil Spence OM on his work: From broadcast interview with John Donat', *The Listener,* 18 February 1965, p.255
[89]Ibid.
[90]*RIBAJ,* 9 January 1932, p.192; Despite his ambition and talent, Spence never entered for the Rome Scholarship. Presumably this was because he was more concerned with starting to earn money and beginning to build his professional reputation. Winning the Rome Prize would have delayed his entry into private practice for three years and would have also delayed his election as an Associate member of the RIBA.

offices were losing their jobs and private practices were struggling to survive or being forced to close.

William Kininmonth had worked as an assistant for Rowand Anderson & Paul from 1927-29 and he returned there in 1930.[1] Having gained his Diploma in 1931 he again sought work with Rowand Anderson & Paul, but in the harsh economic climate Balfour Paul could not afford to take him on as an assistant.[2] He was prepared, though, to offer him the use of a room which Kininmonth accepted.[3] With office space organised and family contacts providing two design commissions, Spence was invited to join him in practice.

Spence had an income from his teaching post at the ECA, but it was vitally important, professionally and financially, to start to build up a portfolio of work. Clients needed to see what he was capable of and, for the ambitious Spence, it was essential to accrue evidence of professional practice as a principal, in order to apply eventually for election to the Fellowship of the Royal Institute of British Architects. For any architect wishing to progress in the profession, the status afforded by the all important letters FRIBA was essential to their future career.

Spence accepted Kininmonth's offer and, in October 1931, the practice of Kininmonth & Spence was formed. They began their professional careers sharing a drawing board and not only working at the same desk, but also often on the same drawings. Definitive attribution of drawings to either of them during this early period is consequently problematic.[4]

The two founding commissions of the practice came from business partners of Kininmonth's brother and the earliest drawings for both projects are

[1] Clive Fenton in Long & Thomas (2007), p.36 note.4
[2] William Hardie Kininmonth, DSA biography report http://ww.scottisharchitects.org.uk [accessed 11 June 2008]
[3] Fenton in Long & Thomas (2007), p.36
[4] Fenton in Long & Thomas (2007), p.37

dated May 1931 and were started by Kininmonth prior to Spence joining him.[5] The first, for Dr G Grant Allan, at Craiglockhart, Edinburgh, was a large, symmetrically planned, two storey house. Although Kininmonth's name is on the earliest drawings, Spence provided the presentation perspective which shows an imposing dwelling, very reminiscent of Lutyens, with its white rendered walls, monumental, window-pierced chimney stacks at either end, and steeply pitched, ogee shaped roofs.[6]

The second house, 'Lismhor' at Easter Belmont, Edinburgh, for Dr King, was in stark contrast to the Craiglockhart design (see Figure 6). The client was clearly aware of European developments in modern architecture and, although the brick construction and rather staid internal planning of the house were not in accord with Modernist principles, it was in an overtly Modern style: flat roofed and strongly geometric in composition with horizontal bands of metal-framed windows wrapped around the corners of the building. The roof of the single-storey living-room, which projected forwards in a large semi-circular bay, formed an open-air sleeping balcony.

As Clive Fenton notes, when work started on Dr King's house the Modern Movement 'had influenced very few buildings in Britain'. By the time it appeared in *The Architect and Building News* in August 1935, 'British Modernist houses, in a variety of permutations were appearing regularly in its pages'.[7] The notable features of Lismhor, which gave it a very nautical quality or 'steamboat' style, would become very common features of 1930s architecture, appearing in housing, flats, factories and schools.

[5] Fenton in Long & Thomas (2007), p.37
[6] Ibid.
[7] Clive Fenton 'Basil Spence in the 1930s and 1940s', unpublished essay for AHRC Spence research project

In January 1932 the winners of the RIBA Arthur Cates Prize were announced. The brief for the competition had been to design a bridgehead, in a large city, which connected with an important shopping street.[8] Four submissions were received and the prize was awarded jointly to Spence and Matthew, the latter also winning the Soane Medallion.[9] The assessors praised Spence's traffic layout, but criticised his building layout along the river: '[Spence] runs skyscrapers along his river frontage. A skyscraper may be a pleasant thing […] but it would suffer by multiplication, and the river frontage would be highly reminiscent of the Fletton brick works'.[10]

The responses of Matthew and Spence to the Cates Prize were very different: while Matthew used the prize as a springboard for a programme of planning research, into which he 'plunged voraciously', Spence made relatively little of his success.[11]

In 1932 Kininmonth and Spence were commissioned to design a house for a site close to the King House in Easter Belmont. The dwelling, for the Reid sisters, was L-shaped in plan and had a single-storey bow-ended living room, carrying an open, roof terrace, similar to the King house, but without the austere lines of the King house. Spence produced an atmospheric perspective (see Figure 7) showing the building rising impressively from the steep ground on which it sat, its solid, robust appearance and imposing entrance, belying its fairly modest size.[12] The hipped roof, with its dark blue, glazed tiles and deep eaves took its cue from turn of the century Jugendstil architecture. Utilizing the slope of the ground, the garage was tucked underneath the east end of the

[8] *RIBAJ,* 23 January 1932, p.215
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Glendinning (2008), p.44
[12] RCAHMS DP010912 House at Easter Belmont, Edinburgh, 1932

house and above it a narrow, continuous, stair window ran the height of the building.

Although Spence had gained his diploma, and exemption from the RIBA Final Examinations, he was still required to sit the Professional Practice paper which was an independent RIBA examination. He sat the paper in December 1932 and was listed among successful candidates in the January edition of the *RIBAJ*.[13] At the end of January his name again appeared in the Journal as the winner of the prestigious Pugin Studentship. The judges commented that his drawings 'showed care and affection and a feeling for the subject greatly to be admired'.[14]

The following June Spence was finally able to apply for Associate membership of the RIBA. Two of his proposers were Reginald Fairlie, for whom he had produced presentation perspectives, and John Begg. At the Council meeting of 12th June 1933, Spence was formally elected ARIBA.[15]

In 1933 the partnership gained its first commercial commission: a petrol station and repairs shop on Causewayside, Edinburgh (see Figures 4 and 8). The Southern Motors Garage, a two-storey building with a cantilevered first floor, took its cue from a garage in Paris by Robert Mallet-Stevens. Its sleek white painted render, however, covered a steel frame and brick infill; only the first floor was of concrete. With its crisp lines and the continuous run of metal windows across the full length of the first floor, it was an essay in modernity; a clean and bright building, which Spence highlighted in atmospheric pastel sketches.[16]

[13] *RIBAJ,* 14 January 1933
[14] *RIBAJ,* 28 January 1933, p.211
[15] *RIBAJ,* 17 June 1933, p.649
[16] RCAHMS SC357577 & SC426813 Southern Motors, Causewayside, Edinburgh

By 1934, with a continuing improvement in the economic climate, Balfour Paul was able to offer Kininmonth a partnership. The Kininmonth & Spence practice was now doing very well and the partnership with Balfour Paul was accepted on condition that Spence was taken on as well. With Balfour Paul's agreement the practices merged forming Rowand Anderson & Paul & Partners.

1934 brought several commissions into the practice. One of these, for local authority housing in the fishing village of Dunbar, East Lothian, seems to have been largely designed by Kininmonth, but it was a scheme to which Spence would return in 1950.

Spence also began work on a personal commission: a house for his mother in Comiston Rise, Edinburgh. He was at that time living with her in a flat in Marchmont, Edinburgh and the plan for the new house was presumably prompted by his forthcoming marriage to Joan. It would appear that his parents were no longer living together at this time and it is reasonable to surmise that the nature of Urwin's illness had led to them parting. When Urwin died in late December 1934 he was living in a flat on Promenade, Portobello, nearly five miles to the east of Marchmont.[17]

The year also brought a new opportunity for Spence when he was asked to design an exhibition stand for the Edinburgh Architectural Association.[18] It was his first foray into exhibition design and marked the beginning of a very successful, and lucrative, aspect of his career. For a period after the war it was almost the only work which he was able to obtain and although he would complain about 'getting type-cast' as an exhibition designer, he would later

[17] Fenton (2007), p.39; Register of deaths for the district of Portobello, Edinburgh, 1934. Statutory Deaths 685/08 0205. http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk [accessed 21 November 2008]
[18] Edwards in Long & Thomas (2007), p.49

mourn the decline of national exhibitions, which he saw as hot-houses for forcing new architectural seeds.[19]

On the 6th September 1934 Spence and Mary Joan Ferris were married and they spent their honeymoon in Germany where they visited the Weissenhof Siedlung and the Schocken department store at Stuttgart.[20] The formidable partnership which they had formed on the badminton court, would continue throughout their marriage; Spence described his wife as 'the reinforcement in the concrete'.[21] She was fiercely loyal, totally confident in his abilities and very protective, notably vetting the hundreds of letters he received after winning the competition for Coventry Cathedral and destroying the abusive ones before he saw them.[22] She was described as 'kindly and masterful' and 'the power behind the throne'.[23] As Spence's daughter writes: 'What is certain is that he would not have achieved all he did achieve without her amazing common sense, wit and intelligence'.[24]

Spence was still working as a part-time lecturer at ECA, and was now joined there by Kininmonth. Both men continued to teach at the College, despite the increasing work-load of the practice.

The first publicity for the Kininmonth and Spence practice appeared in 1935 when, between August and October, four of their early houses were featured in *The Architect & Building News*.[25] The partnership had, by this time, been absorbed in to the Rowand Anderson Practice, but the articles on the Reid and King houses and two other Edinburgh houses, showed the versatility of the architects and ensured that Spence's name, as an architect in his own

[19] Pryce-Jones, *Sunday Telegraph Magazine*, 28 September 1973; 'Inaugural Address of the President', *RIBAJ,* December 1958, p.46
[20] Thomas in Long & Thomas (2007), p.24
[21] Spence (1962), p.16
[22] Ibid., p.26
[23] Pryce-Jones, *The Sunday Telegraph Magazine* (28 September 1973); Edwards (1995), p.75
[24] Gillian Blee in Long & Thomas (2007), p.15
[25] *A&BN*, 9 August 1935, 23 August 1935, 20 September 1935, 11 October 1935

right rather than part of Rowand Anderson & Paul & Partners, was fresh in people's minds.[26]

In 1935 Spence was appointed Lecturer in Advanced History at ECA, in addition to his other teaching duties. The year also brought an opportunity for him to work on interior design, in a scheme for the renovation of Cleghorn's, Princes Street, Edinburgh.[27]

Spence's magpie-like approach to collecting architectural ideas, which would later reappear, transformed and personalised, is in evidence in his drawings for the interior of Cleghorn's (see Figure 9). Counters down either side of the store led towards a sweeping, spiral staircase, which curled up around a central drum to the upper floor. The motif was very similar to a staircase in Leo Nachlicht's Gourmenia Restaurant, Berlin, a photograph of which appeared in the *Architectural Review* in 1930. Spence took the idea, but linked the anti-clockwise sweep of the stairs to one of the circular openings between the floors, creating an elegant reversed 'S' which emphasised and appeared to elongate the staircase. His facility with materials and his ability to create visual effect were apparent in the drum around which the stairs appeared to rise. Unlike that of the Gourmenia Restaurant, the central drum at Cleghorn's was in fact curved plywood.[28]

In 1935 Spence and Kininmonth were approached by a Mrs Elliot who wanted a design for a house at Broughton, near Biggar. She had sought advice from James McGregor and Joe Gleave of ECA and they recommended Spence and Kininmonth. Eventually, however, all four were asked to produce schemes and Spence's tower house proposal was eventually chosen.[29] Broughton was to

[26] Balfour Paul died in 1938 leaving Kininmonth and Spence as the sole partners of the practice.
[27] Fenton in Long & Thomas (2007), p.40
[28] See Fenton in Thomas & Long (2007), p.40
[29] Clive Fenton, 'Basil Spence in the 1930s and 1940s, unpublished essay in AHRC Spence Project archive.

be the first of several large country houses which Spence designed, houses he would refer to on his 1946 application for RIBA Fellowship as 'all of the 16 bedroom variety'.[30]

The design for Broughton Place went through many revisions until the final design was agreed in May 1936 (see Figure 10). A picturesque, four-storey building, with round towers, pedimented windows and crowstep gables, it appeared to have grown, evolved and matured over the centuries, but the solidity of its appearance belied the fact that it was built of harled brick rather than stone.

As Spence's reputation as an innovative and modern architect grew, he appears to have become rather embarrassed by Broughton Place. In 1963, the Editor of *House & Garden* wrote to Spence asking for details of his Scottish buildings.[31] Spence wrote back, 'there is a castle in Peebleshire which I built … I have always tried to keep this dark as it is a complete pastiche but I do not mind it being shown now.'[32]

Spence returned to exhibition design in 1936, when he was chosen as selector and designer for the Exhibition of Scottish Everyday Art at the Royal Scottish Museum.[33] The success of this exhibition led to his appointment by the Scottish Development Council (SDC), to design the Scottish Trade Pavilion for the Johannesburg Empire Exhibition. He was next asked by Thomas Tait to join his team of designers for the Empire Exhibition, to be held in Glasgow in 1938.

The exhibition, at Bellahouston Park (discussed in section 3.2), gave Spence an ideal opportunity to show his versatility as an architect and designer. He worked on three very different projects for the exhibition: the Scottish

[30] Application for Fellowship in Spence Biographical File, RIBA Library, dated 4 December 1946. Spence was elected FRIBA on 15 April 1947.
[31] RCAHMS MS 2329/X/19/16/203 letter Robert Harling to Spence 4 July 1963
[32] RCAHMS MS 2329/X/19/16/202 Letter Spence to Harling 10 July 1963
[33] Elizabeth Cumming, 'Sir Basil Spence', *Crafts,* May/June 2003, p.20

Pavilions, which had some input from Tait; an ideal Scottish house, blending traditional and modern elements, which formed the pavilion for the Council for Art and Industry (CAI), and the highly original ICI pavilion, a commission won in a limited competition (see Figure 11).[34]

Of the three designs, the ICI pavilion was undoubtedly the most successful; the Scottish architect Robert Hurd believed it to be the best pavilion in the exhibition, and Spence would design several more exhibition stands for the company later in his career.[35] The success of the exhibition greatly enhanced Spence's reputation, it also gave him the opportunity to visit the 1937 *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne*, held in Paris, where he would have seen Picasso's 'Guernica' on display in the Spanish Pavilion, and Alvar Aalto's Finnish Pavilion.[36]

Since joining with Balfour Paul, Kininmonth and Spence had started to focus their energies on separate projects, rather than working together as they had done at the beginning of their own informal partnership. In February 1933, the North-Edinburgh MP Alexander Erskine-Hill commissioned Spence to design a house in Lanarkshire. 'Quothquhan' was of a similar scale to Broughton Place, although in a very different in style. The house once again followed historical precedent, taking its cue from Culter House, a 17th century building, but now largely of 18th and 19th century appearance. Although Culter House displayed evidence of organic growth over time, Spence's design for 'Quothquhan' was a totally unified scheme, again brick-built with white painted render, Regency in feel, but modern in proportion.

[34] Edwards in Long & Thomas (2007), p.54
[35] Charles McKean, *The Scottish Thirties: An architectural introduction* (Edinburgh, 1987), p.38; Edwards in Long and Thomas (2007), p.54
[36] Edwards in Long & Thomas (2007), p.50

The commission for the third of Spence's houses 'of the 16 bedroom variety', 'Gribloch', came from the steel-magnate John Colville, a cousin of Mrs Eskine-Hill and a member of the Scottish Committee of the CAI.[37] Broughton Place had required many revisions before the final scheme was agreed, the Colville commission caused Spence far greater problems. The clients were demanding and impatient, and Spence was busy with other contracts including the Empire Exhibition. None of his schemes entirely pleased the Colville's and eventually Mrs Colville brought in an American architect, Perry Duncan, who corresponded with Spence by post and revised his overall design. Spence must have found the situation very difficult, his architectural integrity was being challenged and he was being forced into accepting the views of a distant third party rather than working collaboratively. When Gribloch finally reached completion in 1939 (see Figure 12), it lacked the cohesion and elegance of Spence's initial designs.

In 1937 Spence added educational buildings to his portfolio when he won the competition for a new school at Kilsyth, the Scottish School of Art and Industry (see Figure 13). The scheme, by the CAI and Stirlingshire County Council, was intended to address concerns about manufacturing and design standards in Scotland, by improving the education of the future workforce and it was planned that the school would become a model for others. Spence carefully researched modern school design, both British and continental, and paid a great deal of attention to the building's orientation, site layout and internal planning. Construction work began early in 1939, and the school appeared in the *Edinburgh Evening News* which described it as the best school in the country.[38] The outbreak of war halted work in 1940 as construction

[37] RIBA Fellowship Application, Spence Biographical File, RIBA Library.
[38] *Edinburgh Evening News,* 3 May 1939.

reached the first floor level. Spence would revise the design after the war and the school was finally completed in 1954.[39]

Spence enlisted in 1939 and in May was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant. Having served in the 94th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Brigade, he transferred to the Camouflage Training Development Unit, based at Farnham, Surrey, and worked there as a technical liaison officer from 1942.[40] He later served as an acting captain in intelligence and in 1944 he joined troops of the 3rd Infantry Division for the Normandy landings. His war service was distinguished by twice being mentioned in dispatches and he finally returned home to Edinburgh in December 1945.[41]

[39] *RIBAJ,* October 1948, pp.523-525
[40] Neil Gregory in Long & Thomas (2007), p.120; additional information from Clive Fenton
[41] Gillian Blee in Long & Thomas (2007), p.13

2.2. Donald Evelyn Edward Gibson: Formative years, training and early career.

2.2a. Scotland and Manchester, 1908-1931.

> He had engineering as much
> as architecture in his veins.
>
> Andrew Saint, 1992.[1]

> One of the few architects who was able to
> comprehend architecture as a synthesis
> of art and science.
>
> Percy Johnson-Marshall, 1992.[2]

Donald Gibson (see Figure 2) was born in Northenden, near Manchester, on the 11th October 1908. His father Arnold Hartley Gibson was senior demonstrator and assistant lecturer in engineering at Manchester University, where he specialized in hydraulics. He had recently published two books on the subject and, within a year of Gibson's birth, was appointed Professor of Engineering for St Andrew's University.[3] In 1909 the family moved to Scotland and took a house in Broughty Ferry, a fairly wealthy area to the east of Dundee.[4] In contrast to the financial difficulties of Spence's childhood, Gibson's family appear to have lived very comfortably and he recalled travelling to Forfar for the summer with two maids and the children's nurse, and he and his brothers having first class season tickets for the train into Dundee.[5]

Schooling for Gibson and his brothers started at a kindergarten in Broughty Ferry, they then moved to Dundee High School, one of Scotland's

[1]Andrew Saint, 'Obituary', *Independent,* 3 January 1992.
[2]Gibson Coll., Percy Johnson-Marshall, 'Donald Gibson – An Appreciation' (31 March 1992).
[3]Arnold Hartley Gibson, *Water Hammer in Hydraulic Pipe Lines* and *Hydraulics and its Applications,* both published by Constable & Co Ltd, London, 1908. *Hydraulics and its Applications* became a standard textbook, a new impression was published in 1961.
[4]Obituary Prof. A H Gibson', *The Times,* February 18 1959, p.13
[5]Gibson Coll., Donald Gibson, 'Dundee 1910-1916, 1918-1920', undated manuscript.

oldest and most prestigious independent schools.[6] Gibson was only five or six years old when he started attending the junior section of the school and the poverty he saw in Dundee clearly disturbed him. He recalled:

> the picture which met me every morning as I ran through the granite setted streets and warehouses from Dundee East Station […] to the High School. Most children in the town were bare-foot, especially at most street corners those who sold newspapers.[7]

That encounter with poverty had a profound effect on him and he was aware of his fortunate position from an early age. He later recalled that even as a young child, kneeling to say his prayers, he 'must have been socially aware of my existence, for I remember thanking God that I had such a pretty mother, and that we could wear shoes, and have nice holidays'.[8] The fact that these memories stayed with him suggests that his early awareness of poverty prepared fertile ground for the idea of architecture as a social service working to benefit the mass of the population, and probably lies at the root of his decision to move into the much maligned public sector of the profession almost as soon as he qualified.

Gibson was not a natural student and found school a daunting prospect. Memories of Miss Kid's Kindergarten included sometimes having 'to stand on a corner seat, holding a cane in my hand, and with a paper "Dunces" hat on my head', and while the 'stone pedimented grandeur' of the High School provided a haven from the poverty which Gibson met on Dundee's streets, it also left him feeling 'frightened. I was scared every day by the strap. I kept a very low profile […] and so hoped to avoid being winkled out and strapped'.[9]

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[6]Gibson Coll., Donald Gibson, 'Dundee 1910-1916, 1918-1920', undated manuscript, p.2
[7]Ibid., p.4
[8]Ibid., p.3
[9]Ibid., p.4

Professor Gibson's interests lay not just in hydraulics, but also in architectural engineering and engines. In 1914 his solution to the complex problem of correctly calculating the stresses within circular-arc girders, often used to support theatre balconies, was published.[10] In 1916, having been commissioned as a Captain in the Royal Field Artillery at the outbreak of war, he was put in charge of aero engine research at the Royal Aircraft Factory at Farnborough.[11] The family accompanied him to Hampshire and Gibson and his two brothers joined girls at the local convent to carry on their schooling.[12] They returned to Dundee after the war, but in 1920 moved back to Manchester when their father became Professor of Engineering at Manchester University.

Gibson was sent to Manchester Grammar School and continued to show little notable academic ability. He was in one of the lowest forms and achieved 'indifferent exam results', but he passed the Matriculation examinations which were a requirement for potential university entrants.[13] While Gibson does not seem to have benefited greatly from the school educational system, it is reasonable to assume, from the evidence of his career, that his real education was taking place at home.

His father was then President of the engineering section of the British Association, a member of the Board of Trade Committee on Water Power Resources and co-author of their report *Water Power in the British Empire*.[14] He was also busy editing the six volume series *Modern Mechanical Engineering*, to

[10]A H Gibson and E G Ritchie, *A Study of the Circular-Arc Bow-Girder*, (London: Constable & Co, 1914)
[11]'Obituary Prof. A H Gibson', *The Times,* February 18 1959, p.13; Professor Gibson's innovative work at Farnborough on the development of new cylinder designs for aircraft engines is discussed in George Genevro, 'Air-cooled aircraft engine cylinders: An evolutionary odyssey – Part 1 From the past', http://www.enginehistory.org/air-cooled_cylinders_1.htm [accessed 02 November 2007]
[12]Gibson Coll., Donald Gibson, 'Memoirs - Some childhood memories', undated manuscript.
[13]'Donald Gibson', *AJ*, 20 January 1955, p.77; Gibson was in form Vc. the seventh out of eight forms,'Successful Matriculation Scholars', *Manchester Guardian,* 28 August 1926, p.7
[14]Sir Dugald Clerk and Prof. A H Gibson, *Water Power in the British Empire: Reports of the Water-Power committee of the Conjoint Board of Scientific Studies* (London: Constable & Co, 1922)

which he contributed sections of Volume III.[15] In 1925 he was appointed to a committee examining the feasibility of building a tidal barrage across the River Severn and supervised the construction of a scale model of the Severn Estuary, at Manchester University, to establish its possible effects.[16] By design or accident, his son clearly absorbed and assimilated an appreciation of what engineering could achieve, and an enthusiasm for its possibilities.[17] When Professor Gibson astutely decided that his son should study architecture, apparently based on the fact that he enjoyed drawing and model making, Gibson finally found his métier.[18]

In October 1926 he joined the BA Honours Architecture course at Manchester University School of Architecture. His father was a Senate representative on the consultative committee which oversaw the School.[19] Illustrations of students' work in the School Prospectus show the strong Beaux-Arts influence which permeated the majority of architectural education at that time; there was a clear bias towards Classical design and axial symmetry, however a great many of the projects were on a smaller and more practical scale than the grandiose projects traditionally associated with the Beaux-Arts. The language associated with Beaux-Arts training was also less in evidence; the twenty-four hour *esquisse* still played a vital role in the educational process, but was now simply termed a 'sketch design' exercise, which suggests that the School was beginning to break away from the Beaux-Arts approach, if only in

[15]Arnold H Gibson & Alan E L Chorlton (eds.), *Modern Mechanical Engineering*, Vols I-VI (London: Gresham, 1923)
[16]'Obituary Prof. A H Gibson', *The Times,* 18 February 1959, p.13
[17]Gibson's older brother Osborne's profession is listed as 'Engineer' on his Royal Aero Club Aviator's Certificate, July 1933: http://www.ancestry.com/ Royal Aero Club Aviators' Certificates 1910-1950 [accessed 8 January 2009]
[18]'Obituary Sir Donald Gibson', *Daily Telegraph,* 27 December 1991.
[19]The School was established in 1903 by the Victoria University of Manchester, Manchester Society of Architects and Manchester Education Committee. In 1922 it passed into the sole control of the University: Manchester University Archive (MUA) *The University of Manchester School of Architecture Prospectus 1926-27* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1926), p.5

terminology.[20] Mention of design *en loge,* only appears in reference to fifth year examinations.[21]

Architectural students were taught within the original Owens College building in Oxford Road, a large Victorian Gothic edifice designed by Alfred Waterhouse and opened in 1873. In contrast with the classical elegance of the Edinburgh College of Art building, Owens was designed as a centre of scientific rather than artistic learning. It housed 'chemical and physical laboratories [and] the Natural History and Geological Museums [a] large library and various lecture and examination rooms'. It was hoped that it 'would become the centre of the scientific culture of the north of England'.[22]

The School of Architecture at Manchester continued in that scientific approach and the course was intended to teach architecture as a profession rather than as an artistic skill. Understanding and appreciation of materials and the development of drawing skills were central to the Manchester course, as they were at ECA; however, understanding of materials was not intended to produce an artisan-architect and artistic expression was subordinated to the necessities and practicalities of architectural exactitude.

Manchester students did not have the inspirational space of the ECA sculpture court, but they had an 'Antique and Life Room' and, in addition to studios and lecture rooms, they also had a reading room and use of the Engineering laboratory.[23] The prospectus for the School noted that 'much importance' was placed on the 'provision of a comprehensive library'.[24]

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[20] MUA School of Architecture, *Programmes 1933-1934 and 1934-1935*, a bound collection of programmes of work for first to fifth year students, detailing design brief, issue and submission dates; The term *esquisse* is occasionally used in these programmes, however the length of time allocated to these pieces is never less than three days.
[21] MUA *School of Architecture Prospectus 1931-32,* (Manchester: MUP, 1932) p.14
[22] *Nature,* 6 October 1870, p.450 http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/HistSciTech/HistSciTech-idx?type=turn&entity=HistSciTech001200880002&isize=text [accessed 10 October 2008]
[23] MUA, *School of Architecture Prospectus* 1926-27 (Manchester: MUP, 1926), p.5
[24] Ibid., p.6

The School of Architecture was headed by Professor Archibald Campbell Dickie FSA, better known in academic circles as an archaeologist.[25] The senior lecturer, Wilfred B Edwards, Lecturer in Architecture and Master of Design, was a practising architect and a graduate of the School of Architecture at Liverpool University.[26] Liverpool was at the forefront of architectural education and its influence was widespread; its graduates were beginning to fill senior teaching posts and an increasing number of State and municipal positions.[27] In 1928 Edwards was joined at Manchester by fellow Liverpool alumnus John Williams, as Lecturer in Building Construction. Both will have brought a strongly Beaux-Arts approach with them.[28]

In his first year Gibson took courses in the general history of architecture, building construction, elements of architecture and 'the various branches of drawing required for the effective illustration of architecture'. He also had to take three subsidiary subjects, for his Intermediate examinations, choosing a language, history or English and maths or physics.[29] Students had to have successfully passed these subjects by the end of their third year, but Gibson sat his French and Pure Maths examinations at the end of his first year. His results (class II in both subjects) were again indifferent, but perhaps the subjects were a little too reminiscent of school for him to excel.[30]

The rest of the course aimed 'to nurture in the mind of the student, a sense of fundamental values and reasons broadly expressed in the courses of General History and Building Construction'.[31] While the approach was not an

[25]Dickie, an expert on Palestine, carried out important excavations on the West Hill of Jerusalem in the late 1890s: F J Bliss and A C Dickie, *Excavations at Jerusalem 1894-1897* (London: n.pub., 1898)
[26]MUA *Prospectus 1926-27*, p.5
[27]Lionel Budden (ed.), *The Book of the Liverpool School of Architecture* (Liverpool: University of Liverpool, 1932) p.37-8
[28]MUA *Prospectus 1926-27*, p.5; Budden (1932), p.44
[29]MUA *Prospectus 1926-27*, p.5
[30]*Manchester Guardian,* 3 October 1931, p.11
[31] MUA *Prospectus 1926-27,* p.5

Arts and Crafts one, an appreciation of materials and their qualities was of central importance. The History of Architecture course aimed to treat the subject 'more particularly from the standpoint of the craftsman and designer' with 'emphasis [...] laid upon the influence of materials, not only upon minor features, but also upon the designer in his major conception'.[32] Building Construction covered the various building trades, sources of supply and quality of materials and students were taken to construction sites and 'builders' shops' to see work in progress.

Drawing was also crucial and although the prospectus noted that studio time spent in free-drawing, life and modelling was 'comparatively short', students were expected to supplement this 'outside hours'.[33] Whilst drawing at ECA encouraged the artist to emerge from the work, drawing at Manchester kept students on a tighter rein, with a greater emphasis on fitness for purpose than on artistic prowess. Students were encouraged 'to keep the *object* of the drawing to the forefront', and the six hours of architectural drawing each week were directed to:

> the illustration of Architecture in the particular manner best suited to that purpose, bearing in mind that the free and full handling of media must eventually be subordinated to exactitude, which is often irksome to the accomplished graphic artist. [34]

The History of Architecture course was coordinated with work in the architectural design studio, so that from an early stage the students acquired 'a scale knowledge of traditional features in common use'. These were assembled in simple studies, before moving on through minor groupings to the 'more difficult problems of Modern planning and design'.[35]

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[32] MUA *Prospectus 1926-27*, p.6
[33] Ibid., p.6
[34] Ibid., p.6
[35]MUA *Prospectus 1926-27*, p.6

In keeping with the Beaux-Arts basis of architectural education at the time, Classical architecture was the foundation of the syllabus: 'as a medium in teaching and appreciation of proportion, the Classic manner is favoured, and students are confined as much as possible to the traditions of that period until they have acquired an instinct for form'.[36]

Twenty-four hour sketch designs, effectively *esquisse* exercises, provided some opportunity of escape from the 'Classic manner', and might involve designing a cover for a journal or a sign for a roadside café.[37]

The second year added mechanics, hygiene and sanitation to the core courses and architectural drawing and design now required 'not less than 15 hours to be in the studio'.[38] Drawing proceeded '*pari passu* with other studies' and from the earliest stages of drawing 'the value of showing constructional jointing [was] emphasised, so as to develop the faculty for thinking and drawing in terms of building'.[39] Building Construction and Hygiene kept 'the practical needs of his art before the student' and short courses on town planning established 'at an early stage the value of environment and manner, and so to widen the conception of architectural fitness'.

Second year students moved on to larger design projects such as a four bedroom house with servants' quarters and one day exercises might involve designing the body for a car.[40] Integration of the courses ensured that students always kept the practicality and feasibility of their designs to the fore, as they had no way of predicting whether a sketch design exercise might have to form part of a larger design or constructional project; a decorative scheme for a village hall, prepared as a one day exercise, had to be incorporated into a

[36]Ibid.
[37]MUA, *Programmes 1933-34 and 1934-35*
[38]MUA, *Prospectus 1927-28*, p.16
[39] Ibid., p.7
[40] MUA *Programmes 1933-34 and 1934-35.*

detailed design for the hall itself and ½ inch working drawings then had to be prepared as part of the constructional design course.[41]

At the end of the second year students took their Part Ia examinations. They also presented Testimonies of study in elements of Architectural Design and Town Planning. Gibson passed these examinations, but apparently remained in 'a low position on exam lists until his third year'.[42]

The third year clearly marked a turning point for Gibson; he won a travelling scholarship, which took him to Italy to study the Renaissance, one of his drawings was published in the School Prospectus for 1929-30 and it appears that he achieved a higher position on the examination lists.[43] His examination success also meant that he took his first steps towards RIBA membership, with his registration as a probationer in October 1929 and his election as a student of the RIBA on the 4th November.[44]

The improvement in his fortunes may reflect the fact that Gibson had at last settled in and found his feet, however details in the Prospectus suggest that changes in the course content, from the second to third year, may explain his sudden improvement. While the core courses continued, there was now a clear shift in emphasis towards the mechanics of building and a greater opportunity for practical work; three hours a week were devoted to advanced building construction, looking at reinforced concrete and steel framing, and students were required to spend twenty-five hours each term in the testing laboratory.[45]

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[41] Ibid.

[42] *AJ,* 20 January 1955, p.77

[43] *AJ,* 20 January 1955, p.77: This notes the scholarship in the third year, but the *Daily Telegraph,* 27 December 1991, records it being fourth year; Available prizes included the Manchester Institute of Builders travelling studentships and the RIBA Tite Prize. Gibson never mentioned winning the Tite Prize, it is therefore probable that he won one of the studentships; 'Working drawing to a Publishing House', MUA *Prospectus 1929-30,* p.29

[44] *RIBAJ*, 23 November 1929, p.67 & 68; Qualification as a Student of the RIBA was not a foregone conclusion, pass lists in the *RIBAJ,* 11 January 1930, p.176 and 12 July 1930, p.651, record a 31% and 43% qualification rate . Even those who passed their final year Part II examinations might fail the RIBA's Professional Practice examination; the list in *RIBAJ,* 11 January 1930, records a pass rate of 66%.

[45] MUA *Prospectus 1928-29,* p.16

There was also a change in staff in 1928 as John Williams, a Liverpool graduate, became lecturer in building construction.[46] This was an area of particular interest to Gibson throughout his career and although it cannot be proved that Williams's appointment had any impact on Gibson's progress, it cannot be discounted.

Students began to work out, in detail, buildings which had been laid out during the second year Town Planning course. One-day sketch designs continued to stimulate the imagination with a breadth of subjects which might include a children's footbridge or an exhibition stand for a plywood manufacturer.[47] Construction projects ranged from details for a steel roof truss for a banking hall, to the production of bending moments and shear diagrams and designing a padstone for a rolled steel joist.[48]

Architectural Design projects became more involved. Gibson's plans and elevations for a Publishing House were published in the 1929-1930 Prospectus (see Figure 14).[49] Programmes of third year work from 1933-1935 include: Council offices with an Architects and Surveyors office; a 40 bedroom riverside hotel and an electric labour saving kitchen.[50] Detailed research projects were also set in conjunction with tuition subjects, the programmes of work show that instruction on hotels and wayside inns was accompanied by research including alternative parking systems and bar service.

The changes in the content of the course clearly benefited Gibson and the addition of a thesis design, memoir and an oral examination to the end of year exams may also have been to his advantage.[51] He had never excelled at formal desk-based examinations and may have been more confident with verbal and

[46] Ibid., p.3
[47] MUA *Programmes 1933-34 and 1934-35*
[48] Ibid.
[49] MUA *Prospectus 1929-30,* p.29
[50] MUA *Programmes 1933-34 and 1934-35*
[51] MUA *Prospectus 1926-27,* p.14

written presentations. He certainly appears to have passed his Part Ib examinations with much improved marks and was now exempted from the Intermediate examinations for Associate of the RIBA.[52]

There was another change in the academic staff at the start of Gibson's fourth year when fellow Manchester student John Leslie Martin, who had qualified the previous summer, took over as Assistant Lecturer in Architecture and Master of Elementary Design.[53] Exceptionally, Martin had gone straight into the third year at Manchester and won the RIBA Silver Medal and the Soane medallion. He was one of several leading public architects who trained at Manchester, becoming Chief Architect to the LCC in 1953 and eventually Professor of Architecture at Cambridge University. One of the students in the year below Gibson, Hubert Bennett, eventually succeeded Martin as Architect to the LCC in 1956.[54]

All students were encouraged to obtain architectural work during the vacations; Gibson worked for W B Edwards and J T Halliday, both lecturers at Manchester.[55] During their fourth and fifth years students were required to complete two six months office placements which were carried out between Easter and September.[56] In class the work load for fourth years increased considerably; the Prospectus specifies thirty-six hours in class each week, as opposed to twenty-six in the third year.[57] Building construction was now taught individually, according to the needs of student's own particular designs, and timed sketch designs were 'criticised where possible by lay visitors who have a

[52] *AJ,* 20 January 1955, p.77
[53] *Manchester Guardian,* 14 November 1929, p.14.
[54] *RIBAJ,* 11 January 1930, p.172; Elain Harwood 'Sir Hubert Bennett', *Independent on Sunday*, 25 January 2001.
[55] Gibson Coll., Curriculum Vitae [1936?]; Halliday was working on Battersea Power Station: CgMs Ltd Planning Consultants http://www.cgms.co.uk/project-sheet/battersea [accessed 02 August 2008]
[56] MUA *Prospectus 1926-27,* p.5
[57] Ibid., p.7

special knowledge of the particular building's functions'. Some of these designs were then revised during longer design exercises.

Fourth years faced a range of design projects from an orphanage to a block of fifty flats, and construction projects were again linked to the design course.[58] The programmes of work show that schemes for civic decorations, usually to celebrate a royal visit, were often set as one-day sketch design exercises and one of the two extant student pieces by Gibson, held in the RIBA Drawings Collection, is a fourth year sketch design for 'Decorations to Owens for a Royal visit' (see Figure 15).[59]

This piece and its companion, the undated 'Sketch of gate-house to the bridge to a frontier town' (see Figure 16), highlight one of the fundamental differences between Gibson and Spence: Gibson was not a natural artist.[60] Whereas Spence possessed the facility and fluency of technique to capture his ideas quickly on paper, rendering light and spatial form with remarkable skill, Gibson fared less well. He found the swift rendering of three dimensional form and perspective problematic and lacked the confident technique which Spence exhibited. Plans, elevations and sections were not an issue and, as his published fourth and fifth year work shows, he could produce accomplished drawings if given the time. Indeed he mentions in his curriculum vitae for the Isle of Ely post that he was a 'Soane' finalist.[61] Unfortunately, the publication of finalists' details under pseudonyms means that it has not been possible to single out Gibson's entry, nor to ascertain the year in which he entered.

Easter 1930 brought an end to class studies and students began their office placements. Gibson travelled to America to join the Boston firm of

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[58] MUA *Programmes 1933-34 and 1934-35*
[59] V&A RIBA Drawings Collection PA 895/14(2) Stamped '4th Year' therefore 1929-30.
[60] V&A RIBA Drawings Collection PA 895/14(1)
[61] Gibson Coll., CV.

Coolidge, Shepley, Bulfinch and Abbott, leaving Liverpool aboard the SS Cedric on the 29th March 1930.[62] The Coolidge Shepley practice was one of the few American architectural practices which was not only surviving the Depression, but continuing to grow while others reduced in size or closed.[63] Work was under way on their largest commission at that time, the New York Hospital - Cornell Medical College building, Manhattan, and as 'Harvard's longtime architects of choice', they were working on many projects for the University.[64] The largest of these involved the planning and construction of seven residential student Houses to the north of the Charles River. [65] Gibson was set to work on these under the supervision of Charles Nagel.[66] The Houses consisted of sizeable Georgian Revival buildings, the largest two, Lowell and Dunster, opened to students in autumn 1930, the other five Houses opened the following year.[67]

For Gibson it was an opportunity to witness, in practice, design on the grand Beaux-Arts scale usually confined to students' drawing boards. His work on the Houses allowed him to see how design, planning and materials could be used to achieve visual and physical unity on a large site and how sizeable buildings and public spaces could be given an intimate and human scale.[68] In their architectural survey of the Houses, Bainbridge Bunting and Robert

[62]'New York Passenger Lists 1820-1957' Year:1930; Microfilm serial:T715; Microfilm roll:T715_4711; Page 60, http://www.ancestry.co.uk [accessed 1 August 2008]

[63] Coolidge Shepley Bulfinch and Abbot, now Shepley Bulfinch, is one of the oldest continuously operating architectural firms in the United States; Between 1928-1932 American architectural firms declined by 40%. By 1932, 85% of American architects and technicians were unemployed and construction was only 14% of its 1928 levels: Richard Jennings & Spiro N. Pollalis *Shepley Bulfinch Richardson Abbott: 4 Projects: Understanding Changes in Architectural Practice*, Harvard Design School, http://www.gsd.harvard.edu/people/faculty/pollalis/cases/SBRA-May5-2006.pdf [accessed 11 October 2008], p.31.

[64] http://www.med.cornell.edu/archives/75years/site/index.html [accessed 08 November 2008]; Morton Keller and Phyllis Keller, *Making Harvard Modern: The Rise of America's University* (New York: OUP, 2001), p.198

[65] 'History of Coolidge Shepley Bulfinch & Abbott 1924-1952', http://www.sbra.com/ [accessed 11 August 2008]

[66] *AJ* (20 January 1955), p.77; Nagel became director of the Brooklyn Museum in 1946.

[67]'Samuel Eliot Morison on the Harvard Houses' http://collegiateway.org/reading/morison-1936/ [accessed 11 August 2008]

[68]Harvard Planning and Real Estate, *[V] Vision* (Draft 01.2002) http://www.upo.harvard.edu/reports/patterns/Visions.pdf and *[Ar] Architecture* (Draft 01.2002) http://www.upo.harvard.edu/reports/patterns/Architecture.pdf [accessed 11 August 2008]

Nylander point to the buildings' individuality yet remarkable unity. At Lowell House in particular, there was a consummate handling of space:

> Since Lowell House consists of two quadrangles completely enclosed by massive buildings, the result could have been confining and monotonous. Such a feeling is avoided by skillful exploitation of natural irregularities on the topography and by the masterful way the massing of buildings on different sides of the quadrangles are varied. [...] Furthermore, the two courts are connected by interesting vaulted passage-ways which change levels; thus the spaces of these quadrangles are varied and flowing rather than static and restrictive.[69]

It is unlikely that this lesson in design was forgotten by Gibson in his post-war reconstruction of Coventry's city centre and, although the axial symmetry of that city's re-planning reflected the Beaux-Arts approach which Gibson encountered at Manchester, the overall unity, material harmony and human scale of his proposals for the shopping precinct can be said to reflect what he saw in the riverside Houses of Harvard, particularly Lowell House.

The Harvard Biological Laboratories, opened in 1930, also have some architectural echoes in Gibson's designs for Coventry's post-war central area. In the laboratories the Coolidge Shepley practice 'designed the first "modern" building at Harvard and perhaps the first really distinguished building in Greater Boston that sought to shed completely traditional "historical" ornament', its 'crisply cut vertical panels of windows very much in the new spirit'.[70] Also in the new spirit was 'the architectural carving, […] a great herd of elephants sweeps across the topmost part of the building, carved in the brick […] It is really this carving that still gives this building distinction'.[71] Gibson used various artists to create similar carved brick designs, although on a much smaller scale, for four of his Coventry schools.[72]

[69]Bainbridge Bunting & Robert Nylander, *Old Cambridge: Report 4, Survey of architectural history in Cambridge* (n.p: MIT Press, 1973)
[70]Douglass Shand Tucci, *Built in Boston* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1978), p.225
[71]Shand Tucci (1978), p.225
[72]Coventry History Centre (CHC) CRA/3/1/13604/17 John Hewitt, *Report of the Art Director of the Education (F&GP) Sub-committee on the works of art in the City schools used for embellishment of the buildings* (Coventry: Coventry City Council, [1958-59?])

In addition to architecture and planning Gibson was also learning about office structure and organisation. He was asked to speak on office organisation to the RIBA in 1947 and recalled the office in America as 'one beautiful piece of heaven where there were libraries and all the designing was done, and another absolute hell of a place where all the tracing and working drawings were done'.[73] He had disliked the impersonal nature of this huge office as well as the division which it created. When setting up his own architect's department, in Coventry in 1939, he was able to draw on his experience in Boston in order to create the 'pleasant place to live in' which he wanted for himself and his staff.[74]

Gibson returned to England on the 14th September 1930, and on 2nd October he began his final year at Manchester.[75] Studies were structured in the same way as the fourth year, with classes from October until Easter, and then the final six months spent in an architect's office.[76] Students again spent twenty-four hours a week studying architectural design, and an additional hour of 'aesthetic properties of materials' replaced 'modern architecture theory of design'.[77]

In advanced studies in design, usually three week projects, students might be designing 'a small ferro-concrete building', producing research sheets on airports or re-planning the central area of Manchester.[78] Despite the heavy workload, Gibson found time to join in with the extra-curricular life of the university, playing Rugby over the winter for the University Extra B and C teams.[79]

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[73] 'Architects to Public Authorities', *RIBAJ,* June 1947, p.404
[74] Ibid., p.404
[75]Gibson returned on the White Star Line's SS Adriatic. 'UK Incoming Passenger Lists 1878-1960' Class:BT26; Piece:931; Item:19, http://www.ancestry.co.uk/ [accessed 1 August 2008); MUA *Prospectus 1930-31,* p.9
[76]MUA *Prospectus 1930-31,* p.5
[77]Ibid., p.16
[78]MUA *Programmes 1933-34 1934-35*
[79]*Manchester Guardian,* 21 November 1930, p.3 and 20 February 1931, p.3

In May 1931, Manchester Society of Architects held their annual students' architectural competition and the adjudicators noted that the quality of submissions was 'unusually high'.[80] The competition design for the seniors was a riverside yacht club and two Manchester students earned mention; Hubert Bennett received second prize and Gibson was 'highly commended for his more modern essay, which is strongly reminiscent of a liner on a southern track' (see Figure 17).[81] Gibson's future wife, Winifred Mary (Winmary) McGowan, then in her third year at Manchester, was one of three students who shared first prize in the junior competition for their crèche designs. Both Gibson's and McGowan's designs were illustrated in the School of Architecture *Prospectus 1931-32*.[82] Gibson's Yacht Club was also published in the *RIBAJ* for July 1932, although the Journal printed the wrong name with it.[83]

It is not known where Gibson served his second six month office placement. He mentions work with his lecturers Edwards and Halliday simply as being 'during vacations', and although his CV states that he became 'Senior Assistant to W G Watkins FRIBA' on his return from America, this position was actually taken after he qualified.[84]

In 1931 Gibson took his final Part II examinations. His progress continued and from his rather lacklustre start to the course in 1926, he successfully completed his Part II and was awarded his BA with first class Honours. In 1932 he became an Associate of the RIBA.[85]

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[80]'In Manchester: An imagined riverside', *Manchester Guardian,* 15 May 1931, p.13
[81]Ibid; *RIBAJ,* 20 June 1931, p.608.
[82]MUA *Prospectus 1932-33,* p.29 & 33
[83]*RIBAJ,* 9 July 1932, p.709
[84]Gibson Coll., CV.
[85]MUA, *The Victoria University of Manchester Register of Graduates 1851-1958* (Manchester: MUP, 1959), p.242

2.2b. Early career, 1931-1939.

Gibson's employment after qualifying is set out in a curriculum vitae prepared for the post of Deputy County Architect to the Isle of Ely, and in notes written by Gibson to accompany an autobiographical painting.[1] It is difficult, however, to fit the work he apparently carried out into a five year span and some posts must have been held concurrently, or for shorter periods of time than stated.[2]

His first position after qualifying, and having 'hawked drawings round London and landed up with a recommendation to a Lincoln architect', was with William Gregory Watkins FRIBA.[3] Watkins was a sole practitioner and his small office dealt largely with public work: 'schools, hospitals and churches'.[4] Working as Senior Assistant, Gibson 'carried out the quantities for a few buildings' and gained a very general experience.[5] To supplement his income he began teaching at the local technical college 'keeping one week ahead of his pupils'.[6]

Although Gibson records nearly three years in Watkins' practice it is very hard to substantiate this. He was probably appointed by Liverpool School of Architecture during 1934 and arrived there having done a brief stint at the Building Research Station (BRS), Watford. He was certainly at Liverpool at the beginning of 1935 and had moved to Watford, to re-join the BRS, before October of that year.

Academic staff at Liverpool School of Architecture were traditionally drawn from former students of the School, but Gibson was not, as his profile in the

[1]Gibson Coll., CV; Handwritten notes, 'His Autobiography. Painted 1971'.
[2]Gibson's CV for the Isle of Ely post covers a period of five years, yet it details nearly three years in Lincoln, two years with the Liverpool School of Architecture (LSA) and two and a half years with the Building Research Station (BRS) at Watford.
[3]*AJ,* 20 January 1955, p.77; Watkins's practice work in Lincoln included several schools, the Technical College, St Giles' Church, Lincoln County Hospital nurses' home and ward blocks, the practice also designed the nurses' home at Newark Hospital: Obituary *RIBAJ,* April 1959, p.222
[4]Gibson Coll., CV.
[5]Ibid.
[6]*AJ,* 20 January 1955, p.77

Architects' Journal stated, the first non-Liverpool lecturer to be appointed.[7] *The Book of the Liverpool School of Architecture* (1932), specifically notes two non-Liverpool lecturers in 1929, although the fact that these were singled out shows that Gibson's appointment was unusual.[8]

In the mid 1930s the School of Architecture was in a period of change and reorientation. The ethos of the School was shifting away from Beaux-Arts classicism towards Modernism; social concerns and functional architecture, rather than aesthetics and grand design, were beginning to dominate the thoughts of students.

The Department of Civic Design at Liverpool University had been founded in 1909, as a result of Charles Reilly's desire 'to connect architecture and planning in the public mind'.[9] The Department, Britain's first, brought together planning and architecture as essentially linked disciplines and engendered a general awareness among Liverpool students that the broader aspects and impacts of their work should always be considered.

In 1915 Patrick Abercrombie took over from Stanley Adshead as Professor of Civic Design. He brought a deeply Geddesian approach to planning, 'emphasizing the symbiotic cultural and social interdependence of the city–region' and the 'concept of a town as primarily the setting for human life, rather than a mere pattern of roads and land uses'.[10] Geddes's approach also provided the basis for 'the practice pioneered by [...] Abercrombie [...] of survey, diagnosis, plan'.[11]

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[7] *AJ,* 20 January 1955, p.77
[8]Budden (1932), p.43
[9]Myles Wright, *Lord Leverhulme's Unknown Venture: the Lever Chair and the Beginnings of Town and Regional Planning, 1908-48*, (London: Hutchinson Benham, 1982), p.55
[10]Mervyn Miller, 'Abercrombie, Sir (Leslie) Patrick (1879–1957)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30322 [accessed 10 Jan 2009]; Abercrombie held the Lever Chair at Liverpool until 1935 when he took over, again from Adshead, as professor of town planning at University College, London.
[11]Darling (2007), p.122

Under the direction of Reilly and Abercrombie the school 'developed an openly eclectic approach to new developments'.[12] By the early 1930s, as architecture, social issues and politics became increasingly, and overtly, intertwined, Liverpool students already had a framework on which to build the concept of architecture, planning, science and technology coming together as an interconnected sociological practice. Importantly, and unusually for a School of Architecture at that time, the idea of public sector employment as an acceptable option to private practice was supported at Liverpool, rather than being ignored or denigrated. As a result, Liverpool produced students who would go on to fill many of the important planning jobs after the war.

In 1933 Reilly was succeeded by Lionel Budden as Director of the School of Architecture. Budden had acted as *de facto* head of the school since the First World War and it was he who 'steered the school towards Modernism in a far quieter, more incremental manner than Rowse at the AA'.[13] While Rowse's 'multifaceted revolution' at the AA changed the basis of its teaching and working methods almost overnight, causing three years of turmoil at the school, Budden oversaw a more gradual introduction of socially based projects and group-working into the Beaux-Arts system.[14]

Former student Percy Johnson-Marshall, who was taught by Gibson and joined his Coventry department, recalled that ‘we students had strong views about the need for architecture to have a social purpose, both in regard to individual buildings, and indeed of whole towns’.[15] Students attended lectures

[12]John R Gold, *The experience of modernism*: *Modern architects and the future city 1928-1953*, (London: E & F N Spon, 1997), p.92
[13]Glendinning (2008), p.43
[14]Ibid., p.43
[15]Gibson Coll., P Johnson-Marshall, Appreciation', 1992; Percy Johnson-Marshall (1915-1993) worked for Middlesex County and Willesden Borough (1936-1938), Coventry City (1939-1941), Greater London Region (1948-1949), and London County Council (1949-1959). In 1959 he became Senior Lecturer in the University of Edinburgh Department of Architecture. He became Professor of Urban Design and Regional Planning in 1964, with his own department in Sir Robert Matthew's School of the Built Environment. Percy Johnson-Marshall Collection,

from leading figures in the Modern movement; Chermayeff spoke, Mendelsohn visited in 1933 and Gropius's visit in 1934 left ideas 'indelibly implanted' in the minds of Stirrat and Percy Johnson-Marshall.[16] Both of them 'wanted to take part in the "scope of global action"' and they 'decided to go into some form of public service […] and this conditioned us for most of our lives.'[17]

The impression given is one of dynamism and excitement permeating the whole School, but this attitude was not universal amongst students; Bruce Allsopp, who graduated from Liverpool in 1933, 'felt that his contemporaries in the School were "not much concerned with putting the world to rights", that they were not on the whole political, and that they still believed "an architect's job was to produce beautiful buildings"'.[18]

Gibson joined the School as 'nominally instructor in charge of the first year students', but was quickly asked to take lectures on construction for fourth year students.[19] Having taught at Lincoln Technical College, he had some practical experience of lecturing, but also seems to have possessed a natural talent for putting across complex subjects. Stirrat and Percy Johnson-Marshall, recalled his lectures; Percy noted his ability to convey technical information 'in a quiet but clear way', and Stirrat recalled Gibson's lectures as being 'those which he could at least understand'.[20]

The three architects became life-long friends. Percy joined Gibson's team in Coventry in 1939 and Stirrat, having worked at the Isle of Ely with Gibson,

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Edinburgh University Special Collections Division: http://www.johnson-marshall.lib.ed.ac.uk/cgi-bin/view_isad.pl?id=GB-0237-PJM-INDIA&view=basic [accessed 15 April 2006]

[16]Andrew Saint, *Towards a Social Architecture: The role of school-building in post-war England*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), p.7

[17]Gibson Coll.: typescript: 'Stirrat – a memoir' by Percy Johnson-Marshall'

[18]Obituary, Harold Bruce Allsop (sic), died 22 February 2000, Society of Antiquaries of London, http://www.sal.org.uk/obituaries/Obituary%20archive/harold-allsop [accessed 5 January 2009]; Joseph Sharples, Alan Powers and Michael Shippobottom, *Charles Reilly and the Liverpool School of Architecture, 1904-33*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), p.35.

[19]Gibson Coll. 'Appreciation of Stirrat Johnson-Marshall

[20]Gibson Coll.: P Johnson-Marshall, Appreciation, 1992; Gibson Coll. 'Appreciation of Stirrat Johnson-Marshall'.

played a pivotal role in Coventry's post-war school building programme in his position as Chief Architect to the Ministry of Education. The three men also worked closely together to improve the status of public architects and to effect major changes within the RIBA.

Percy Johnson-Marshall recalled that Gibson arrived in Liverpool from the BRS 'where he had absorbed an astonishing amount of valuable technical information'.[21] Gibson had dealt with varied enquiries about the properties, problems and failures of materials and structures, and it was probably on the basis of this experience that he was put in charge of setting up a new materials gallery at the School of Architecture. This innovative gallery not only offered information on building materials, but also physical examples of materials, some exhibited in structural settings, and a full scale hot water plumbing system.[22]

In addition to his lecturing work and the materials gallery, Gibson took the opportunity to attend town planning lectures given by Patrick Abercrombie and gained his Certificate in Town Planning. He was also working on his MA thesis, 'The development and design of some ancient British bridges', for Manchester School of Architecture.[23] The MA was awarded on November 3rd 1934, a month after Gibson and Winmary were married.[24]

Towards the end of 1934, following their marriage, the couple began work on Gibson's first professional commission, the small Hilary Haworth Nursery, at Lache, near Chester. The significance of the nursery is discussed in detail in

[21] Gibson Coll.: P Johnson-Marshall, Appreciation, 1992.
[22] *RIBAJ,* 7 December 1935, p.158
[23] Manchester University Archive, *Board of Faculty of Arts Minutes* (June 1934), p.63, (p.102 of bound volume); approval for the topic was given on 7 June 1934, Prof. A E Richardson was a referee
[24] *The Victoria University of Manchester Register of Graduates 1851-1958* (Manchester: MUP, 1959) p.242; *Manchester Guardian,* 5 November 1934, p.10 ; Andrew Saint, 'Gibson, Sir Donald Edward Evelyn (1908–1991)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/66459 [accessed 3 November 2006]

the next section.[25] Gibson was still working at Liverpool when the project began, but had returned to the BRS before it was completed in October 1935.[26]

As scientific officer on the staff of the BRS, Gibson was no longer simply dealing with enquiries, but was examining and testing new materials and 'investigating building problems, inspecting buildings in which trouble has occurred, and reporting upon methods of remedial treatments'.[27] It was a challenging job, well suited to Gibson's 'agile mind', his 'flexible intellect' and the fact that he was 'always one jump ahead of things'.[28] Henry Swain described working with him at Nottingham:

> If you didn't give him bloody difficult problems to solve he'd go swanning off and find interesting things to do which were not so relevant. He expected to be made to work, he expected to contribute, he expected people to tell him what the problem was.[29]

He clearly relished problem solving, but he also possessed a 'singlemindedness and implacable determination', could be 'delightfully unconventional' and the fact that 'he thought faster than most people' could make him appear reckless.[30] Swain further described working for Gibson as 'a high risk business [...] frightening, but fun'.[31] Perhaps these traits, untempered by age and experience, were a little uncomfortable for the BRS, because after less than two years he left. Ironically in the light of his later governmental career, 'it was agreed that he would not make the ideal civil servant'.[32]

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[25]Winifred McGowan was awarded her BA Arch, Class II, in July 1933, *Manchester Guardian,* 4 July 1933, p.12
[26]Cheshire County Records Office, Chester (CCRO): ZDES/35/5; ZDES/35/6; ZDES/35/8 Plans of Hilary Haworth Nursery, Lache, near Chester; CCRO ZDES/35/3 Visitors' Book; ZDES/35/9/1 News cutting *The Chronicle,* 2 November 1935.
[27]Gibson Coll.. CV
[28]Fred Pooley, Percy Johnson-Marshall and Brian Bunch, tributes given and read at the RIBA Memorial Celebration for Gibson held 2 April 1992.
[29]Saint (1987) p.165
[30]*AJ,* 8 October 1953, p.435; Fred Pooley 'Mr Coventry's renaissance', *Guardian,* 7 January 1992; Henry Swain, tribute given at Gibson's RIBA Memorial Celebration.
[31]Henry Swain, Ibid.
[32] *AJ,* 20 January 1955, p.77

Early in 1937 he was appointed Deputy County Architect to the Isle of Ely, based at March, 'in the remote fens'.[33] There he met up again with Stirrat Johnson-Marshall, who was chief assistant, and began to gather together a 'handful of like-minded architects, committed to a socially directed modernism that could offer benefits to all'.[34] Johnson-Marshall and Gibson shared the same technological approach to architecture and the belief that architecture and planning in symbiosis with modern materials and engineering could benefit society. The two men and their wives became firm friends.

The small team of architects was engaged on school buildings, while the overall building programme (as with most authorities at the time) was under the charge of a 'jealous and timid county surveyor', leaving Gibson 'trying but generally failing to outflank the surveyor on issues of style and technique'.[35] In these difficult circumstances and in what he saw as a 'rather desolate' part of the country, Gibson's natural ability to create and inspire a team became evident. He felt that the group 'needed to undertake some extra-mural work together as a team' and discovered that with a minimum of nine students, he could set up an evening class at the local High School.[36] All of his staff enrolled and, with Gibson as tutor, they began research into day-lighting in schools, particularly 'aspects of solar admission into school classrooms'.[37]

The job at the Isle of Ely was not challenging and there was little scope for Gibson to exercise his ideas or effect change. In August 1938, Coventry Corporation advertised for the newly created post of City Architect. Gibson applied and was shortlisted from sixty-nine applications. Stirrat Johnson-

[33]Gibson Coll., 'Appreciation of Stirrat Johnson-Marshall.
[34]Andrew Saint, 'Gibson, Sir Donald Edward Evelyn (1908–1991)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, OUP, 2004 http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/66459 [accessed 3 November 2006]
[35]Saint (1987), p.243
[36]Gibson Coll., 'Appreciation of Stirrat Johnson-Marshall.
[37]Ibid.

Marshall helped him with his preparations and, on 24th October, he attended for interview together with W Barrett of Lancashire County Council and H T Wykes of Lewisham Borough Council.[38] The Estates and Parliamentary Committee Minutes for that day recorded that D E E Gibson would take up his duties as City Architect on the 1st January 1939, overseeing a department of twenty-three architectural and ancillary staff.[39]

[38]CHC EPC Minutes 23 August 1938 and 18 October 1938
[39]Ibid., 24/10/1938 p.161

3. Gibson and Spence: Two early projects.

3.1. ‘A precursor of things to come’: Gibson’s Hilary Haworth Nursery School, Lache, near Chester, 1935.

> There was nothing strikingly prefabricatory about it, but it marked a new attitude towards school design and was a precursor of things to come.
>
> R B White, 1965.[1]

> in this plain nursery […] the English movement for light and dry, prefabricated, architect-designed schools found a first, tentative realization.
>
> Andrew Saint, 1987.[2]

The Hilary Haworth Nursery, designed by Donald Gibson, opened on a new housing estate at Lache, near Chester, on the 29th October 1935. This small, timber and asbestos cement building was indeed a 'plain nursery', but elegantly proportioned, light and airy and it heralded the coming shift in approach to school design and construction (see Figure 18)

The place of this ‘precursor’ in the development of post-war school building has been discussed by Saint. This chapter expands upon that by examining the educational context in which the building was designed, a context crucial for understanding the development of the nursery. The evolution of the design will be explored in relation to the work of educationalist Margaret McMillan, the ethos of the Board of Education and the recommendations of the 1933 Hadow Committee on Nursery and Infant Education.

The chapter ends with an examination of the nursery’s significance in Gibson’s career. He would become a 'shining exemplar of the public-sector architect', a man 'whose determination to reshape architecture in terms of new

[1] R B White, *Prefabrication: A history of its development in Great Britain* (London: HMSO, 1965), p.103
[2] Saint (1987), p.50

technologies was accompanied by a profoundly humane view of post-war civic life'.[3] As his first professional commission and first realised design, it will be argued that the Hilary Haworth Nursery can be read almost as a manifesto of the architectural ethos which would remain the bedrock of his entire architectural career. It was a building in which the roots of his life-long concerns with new materials, ease of production, standardisation and prefabrication can all be seen and which clearly signalled his allegiance to the mores of the modern movement.

3.1a. The changing face of education.

The commission for the Hilary Haworth Nursery came late in 1934. At this date there were only fifty-nine recognised nursery schools in England, twenty-six of which were provided by voluntary organisations. These figures stand alongside a total of 3,828 nursery schools in France, of which only 466 were privately run.[1] This differing approach to provision is reflected in the contemporary published material with reports on nursery architecture appearing almost exclusively in European journals, such as *Architecture d'Aujourdhui*, *Construction Moderne*, and *Die Baugilde*.

Although individual buildings found an occasional mention In the British architectural press, it was not until November and December 1937 that the *AJ* ran a series of articles devoted to the design requirements of nursery-infant schools, and 1938 before the *Architectural Record* and *The Builder* followed suit. When the *AJ* reported on the Hilary Haworth Nursery at the end of 1935, its

[3] Louise Campbell, 'Paper dream city / modern monument' in Iain Boyd Whyte (Ed) *Man-made Future: Planning, education and design in mid-twentieth-century Britain* (London & New York: Routledge, 2007), pp.121-122
[1] *AJ,* 28 May 1936, p.835.

introductory explanation of the nursery's function highlighted the comparative novelty of this class of building.[2]

Designated nursery education, however, was very much 'a subject at the forefront of contemporary progressive debate in education'.[3] When the Hadow Report on nursery education came out in 1933, it set out the nursery school's fundamental purpose as to 'provide an environment in which the health of the young child – physical, mental and moral – can be safeguarded'.[4] It was the opinion of the Committee that:

> The nursery school is a desirable adjunct to the national system of education; and that in districts where the housing and general economic conditions are seriously below the average, a nursery school should, if possible, be provided.[5]

That Gibson's first commission was so strongly allied to progressive social issues may simply have been fortuitous. Nevertheless, his approach to the design and construction of the building shows a very clear knowledge of the work of Margaret McMillan, a highly influential figure in education's progressive movement, as well as a clear desire to move beyond the bounds of traditional materials and permanence of construction, into new, modern materials and semi-permanent structures.

McMillan had worked to push nursery education to the 'forefront of contemporary progressive debate'. A Socialist, activist and educationalist, she had worked and campaigned with her sister Rachel, to change approaches to the health, welfare and education of the young, becoming the first president of the Nursery School Association in 1923.[6] She fought for school medical inspec-

[2]'Nursery School at Chester', *AJ,* 19 December 1935, p.921. The building's purpose was to keep its children 'amused and interested, encourage cleanliness and the children's ability to look after themselves, and to supervise their health'.
[3] Darling (2007), p.124.
[4] Hadow Report, *Infant and Nursery Schools* (London: HMSO, 1933), p.182
[5] Ibid., p.187
[6] Albert Mansbridge, *Margaret McMillan: Prophet and pioneer. Her life and work* (London, Toronto: JM Dent & Sons, 1932). Margaret McMillan (b.1860, d.1931) joined the Fabian Society in 1893, became a founder member of the Independent Labour Party in 1893 and a member of

tions, the provision of school baths, good ventilation and clean air in schools, was a staunch advocate of the 'open-air' schools movement and believed that 'the educational system should grow out of the Nursery School System, not out of a neglected infancy'.[7]

Her clear ideas on the ideal educational environment for young children were presented in her 1919 publication *The Nursery School*.[8] Very young children learned best out in the open air in contact with nature; there should be no formal tuition, simply play, exploration and activity interspersed with meals and a period of rest. The traditional educational establishment, regimented, structured and often overbearingly formal in its architectural expression, was no place for the physical, moral and intellectual growth of infants.

The ideal nursery, she believed, should be set in a large open area, with grass, plant beds and trees, not the typical barren and sterile school playground. The children would spend most of their day outside, but would have shelter for inclement weather and short days. This, however, should be little more than a basic timber frame with sheets of asbestos cement affixed to it. The structure should face south or south-east, woodwork should be painted a strong blue or red, the roof should be asbestos sheet and the front of the shelters should be sliding or moveable screens, which would be open for most of the year. Running along the back wall of the shelter should be 'toddlers' cupboards, and built-in cupboards would be used to store the collapsible stretcher beds for the rest periods. The bathroom should open directly off the nursery proper, plenty of towel pegs and toothbrush racks should be provided and a laundry and drying room were a necessity.[9]

its National Administrative Council in 1907. The campaigning of McMillan and her sister Rachel (b.1859, d.1917) led to the introduction of the Provision of School Meals Act in 1906. They set up the country's first school clinic in 1908.

[7] Mansbridge (1932), p.104

[8] Margaret McMillan, *The Nursery School* (London, Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1919)

[9] McMillan (1919), pp.33-42

McMillan reiterated her views in a broadcast address given in 1927, 'the old style of buildings […] will not do. Nursery school buildings are cheap and they must consist of self-contained shelters, built of asbestos, and costing a third of the usual price for buildings'.[10] Her approach grew from a pragmatic nature and the practical experience of making do with what was available. At her first "open air" night camp, set up in Deptford in 1909, she had constructed bed frames out of gas pipes and stretched canvas over them.[11]

McMillan's belief in no-frills provision was mirrored in recommendations by the Board of Education, however, these were intended simply to cut existing costs. In 1911, in an attempt to encourage experimentation with novel, possibly cheaper forms of construction, the Board exempted new school buildings from local bye-laws.

In 1925 the Baines Committee was appointed to enquire into school building costs and to examine the use of different materials and construction methods. They concluded that traditional brick was probably the cheapest method of building and that costs were inflated by the unnecessary adoption of frills, such as additional halls, larger playgrounds, and tables rather than desks. The Committee's report was never published, but their findings had a profound influence on the Board of Education. In 1931, when the Board issued *Educational Pamphlet 86*, they reminded local authorities that the use of 'novel' materials in school building would be given sympathetic consideration, but emphasised that brick was likely to be cheapest in the long run.[12]

The Board's half-hearted attempts to encourage the use of new materials, were driven purely by economic demands, rather than a desire to make school

[10] Mansbridge (1932), p.105 Address given 17 November 1927
[11] Mansbridge (1932), p.103
[12] Seaborne & Lowe, *The English School: its architecture and organisation. Vol:2 1870-1970*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p.118

architecture more responsive to changing pedagogy. The impact of the initiative on design was negligible.

A more concerted attempt to impact positively on English education was made with the appointment of Sir William Hadow, in the early 1920s, to head a series of consultative committees for the Board of Education. The result was an in depth assessment of all aspects of educational provision and recommendations on best practice in both pedagogy and architecture. Six reports were published between 1923 and 1933; the Hadow Report on *Infant and Nursery Schools* appeared in 1933.

The recommendations of the Report clearly reflected the approach of the late Margaret McMillan.[13] Education should not be through indoctrination, but through play and exploration; 'the ideal Infant School is not a classroom but a playground, that is to say, not a limited space enclosed by four walls and a ceiling, but an open area […] where the interests natural to this biological stage of growth can be stimulated and pursued'.[14]

The Committee felt that the problems faced in the education of the very young were 'largely due to the limitations of old buildings which are too solid to wear out.' They therefore commended 'lightness of construction'. [15] It was suggested that a timber-frame building erected on brick or concrete foundations would, under normal conditions, have a lifespan of thirty to fifty years, and was not 'unduly expensive' to maintain; initial costs might be lower and there may also be additional benefits in this form of construction being 'more adaptable to future changes in the methods of training and teaching young children'.[16]

[13] The consultative committee included Dr Albert Mansbridge whose biography of Margaret McMillan was published in 1932.
[14] Hadow (1933), p.161
[15] Ibid., p.166. In late 1938 or early 1939 the Conservative (1922) Committee met the Chancellor of the Exchequer to press for lighter forms of construction in schools, which would have a 40 year life-span. The BoE wrote to local authorities in May 1939 to encourage the use of light construction. (Seaborne & Lowe (1977), p.119-120)
[16] Hadow (1933), p.166

The majority of the nursery section of the Hadow Report was devoted to the development of the very young, however, it did make recommendations on the physical requirements of nurseries. Most of these were followed in the Hilary Haworth Nursery, from general planning and construction, to the fixtures, fittings and equipment needed.

With few architectural precedents to follow there was little pressure to conform to an accepted type, nor, with newly qualified architects, could there have been any expectation by the client in terms of aesthetics or style. In the design for the Hilary Haworth, Gibson and McGowan were therefore able to take the views and recommendations on nursery provision and meld them with a new approach to construction and materials, which reflected Gibson's technical and engineering insights.

3.1b. The Hilary Haworth Nursery.

> 'One of the most ambitious steps yet made in local education'.
>
> *The Chronicle*, 1935.[1]

When the nursery opened at the end of October 1935, local newspapers were fulsome in their praise. Under the headline 'A Paradise for Infants', *The Chronicle* felt that the architects had 'thought of everything which might add to the comfort and care of little ones'. The Bishop of Chester confessed to an initial feeling of 'abhorrence' at such young children being anywhere but within the home environment, however, having seen the building and understood its purpose, he had changed his view. He paid tribute to the architects, calling their work 'absolutely first-class and most fascinating'.[2]

[1] Cheshire County Records Office (CCRO) ZDES/35/9/1 *The Chronicle,* 2 November 1935.
[2] Ibid.

The Nursery was paid for through voluntary contribution and named after the daughter of its principal benefactors. It was, as Saint writes, ‘pure, bald, engineer’s architecture, done without regard for style’, however, it provided, and often bettered, everything set out within the Hadow recommendations and was in accord with the Nursery School Association Statement of Policy.[3] It was true to McMillan’s ideas on construction and it prefigured the accommodation schedule suggested in the Board of Education’s *Educational Pamphlet No: 107*, published in 1936.[4]

The site chosen for the Nursery was a triangular parcel of land, half an acre in size, in the centre of new council housing on the Lache Estate south-west of Chester. The building, designed to take forty children, was compact in form, domestic in appearance and in keeping with the scale of the surrounding houses (Figs.18 & 19). Nevertheless, its silver-grey walls, blue painted windows and doors, contrasting black roof, and large expanse of south-facing windows, marked it out from the neighbouring buildings. The main entrance was on the north side, centrally placed within a flat-roofed, single storey range which wrapped around the taller central section to the east and west. The pitched roof of the central playroom rose above the surrounding ancillary rooms, and the large, south-facing, playroom windows were the only indication of its educational function.

Other nursery buildings tended either to be of uniform height or to stress the importance of the administrative blocks over the children's rooms.[5] For Gibson the children and the philosophy of learning through play were of central importance, and this core purpose of the building also formed its physical core.

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[3] Saint (1987), p.50; CCRO. ZDES/35/4/3 Nursery School Association ‘Statement of Policy May 1927’, revised May 1935

[4] BoE, *Suggestions for the planning of buildings for public elementary schools.* Educational Pamphlet No:107, (London: HMSO, 1936)

[5] 'Some Nursery Schools', *Education*, 24 July 1936, pp.6-12 & 17

The importance of its small occupants was clearly reflected in the dominance of the playrooms over the service rooms. In turn these enfolded the central core on three sides, offering physical protection from the elements and metaphorically wrapping the children in the protective arms of hygiene, medical care, food and adult support.

3.1c. Design Development.

The surviving drawings show that although the final design was published in the names of Gibson and Lemmon, Gibson began work on the project with his new wife Winmary McGowan.[1] How Gibson gained the commission is not recorded, but he was at that time working as a lecturer in construction at Liverpool University School of Architecture and helping to organise a new, materials gallery there.[2] The client may have approached the Liverpool School with the intention of obtaining a more progressive architectural approach to the project, or the choice of Gibson may reflect the more specific decision to find an architect willing to work in novel materials. There is also a possibility that the commission may have come through McGowan, whose 1931 crèche design had featured in the Manchester Society of Architects Competition.[3]

The earliest existing drawing for the nursery is dated 2nd January 1935 (see Figure 20). The basic composition of the plan is recognisably that of the final building, with a large, south facing, play room area at the core of the building and service rooms wrapped around it on three sides, however, the design lacks the assurance of the executed building.[4] Its ungainliness and

[1] CCRO. ZDES/35/7. Blueprint dated 2/1/35
[2] Gibson Coll.. CV
[3] *Manchester Guardian,* May 15 1931, p.13; The crèche is illustrated in *The University of Manchester School of Architecture Prospectus 1931-32*, p.33
[4] CCRO. ZDES/35/7. Print dated 2 January 1935

immaturity in planning and aesthetics, suggest newly qualified architects not yet confident enough to step beyond their Beaux-Arts training.

In his standard text, *The Principles of Architectural Composition*, Howard Robertson had encouraged sensitive application of Beaux-Arts principles and had warned against the 'strong tendency to compress the accommodation of all kinds of architectural programmes into the rigid limitations of the almost completely symmetrical'.[5] Despite this warning and the growing belief that symmetry in school design was incompatible with new teaching methods, Gibson and McGowan's initial design was rigidly symmetrical.

The building was essentially 'U' shaped, but whereas the Hadow Report had recommended a semi-enclosed courtyard plan with pavilion style classrooms and ancillary range wrapping around a central playground, Gibson and McGowan condensed the plan and placed the two playrooms in the central area with the administrative and ancillary rooms around the three sides (see Figure 21).[6] Similarities between this design and McGowan's winning 1931 crèche design suggest that she may have had a greater hand in the initial proposals than Gibson.[7]

The positioning of the playrooms was the most logical feature of the earliest design and remained unchanged throughout the development of the scheme. In all other respects, the attempt to achieve symmetry resulted in poor planning and visually weak elevations. The problems were quickly realised and within a period of four weeks the plans underwent major revision.[8] The second design shows a more mature resolution of the problems of layout, proportion and elevational treatment (see Figure 22).[9]

[5] Howard Robertson, *The Principles of Architectural Composition*, (London: Architectural Press, 1924), p.123. The BAE still listed this as a standard text in 1957: RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/1/62
[6] CCRO. ZDES/35/7. Print dated 2 January 1935
[7] MUA *Prospectus 1931-32*, p.33
[8] CCRO. ZDES/35/6. Print dated 2 February 1935 by Gibson and McGowan.
[9] The *AJ* called it 'a good straightforward plan'. *AJ*, 18 November 1937, p.799

Changes in the roof lines of the central section and the service wings now gave a clear visual emphasis to the playrooms and the relocation of the main entrance provided a central focus for the north elevation and allowed visitors to access the cloakrooms and playrooms without having to pass through the rest of the building. The repositioning of the children's toilets allowed the staffroom and clinic to be placed more centrally within the north range and, although problems remained, the layout was far more practical.

The plan was sent to the BoE on the 9th February 1935 for their comments.[10] Their response to the proposal was not overly complimentary.[11] Their first complaint concerned the size of the school. The Hadow Committee had suggested that a nursery for sixty to eighty children was ideal on educational grounds. On economic grounds, however, an intake of 160-180 should be planned for, comprised of units not exceeding forty children.[12] The size of the Lache nursery was considerably smaller than this. The Board felt that for forty children only one playroom was needed, and that two would mean a duplication of staff. Secondly, with nurseries planned for multiples of forty, Gibson and McGowan's design provided too much space for forty children, but not enough for eighty.[13]

Other issues were based on practical, rather than economic, considerations: four toilets were required rather than three; the kitchen was too small; the staff cloakroom should not form part of the corridor and the external doors from the playroom should open outwards rather than inwards.

The final plan, which is undated and now in the names of Gibson and Lemmon, took account of all the Board's suggestions, with the exception of the

[10] CCRO. ZDES/35/4/2. Letter from the BoE to Gibson. 21 March 1935
[11] Ibid., The letter stated that 'the planning as a whole is not really quite on the lines that the Board would consider desirable for a nursery school.'
[12]Hadow (1933), p.188
[13]CCRO. ZDES/35/4/2. Letter from the BoE to Gibson. 21 March 1935

playroom size which remained unchanged.[14] The address on the plan shows that Gibson had now moved to Watford and was again working for the BRS. Site supervision would now have been difficult and this may be why Cyril Lemmon, a lecturer in materials at Liverpool School of Architecture, became part of the project team. He would have been able to supervise the construction and had the necessary expertise to deal with any problems with the novel building materials.

3.1d. The Realised Design.

The date of commencement on site is not recorded, but even assuming a swift resolution of the issues raised by the BoE, the contract cannot have taken more than seven months, with the first intake of children entering the nursery at the end of October 1935.[1]

McMillan had viewed the ideal nursery structure as little more than a timber frame with asbestos sheet affixed to it. Now those ideas had been given architectural expression. Supported on a concrete raft, the framing of the nursery was light-weight timber, except for the timbers over the playroom windows.[2] It was, according to the *RIBAJ* 'a good example of modern practice in this construction'.[3] Insulation was provided by sheets of aluminium foil with a central core of asbestos to provide rigidity. The *RIBAJ* pointed to recent research into the insulating properties of aluminium foil and described its use here as 'an interesting feature' of the construction.[4]

For the facing materials Gibson employed standard 8 ft by 4 ft asbestos cement sheeting externally and asbestos wallboard internally. Rainwater goods

[14]CCRO. ZDES/35/8 Undated plan
[1] CCRO. ZDES/35/9/1 *The Chronicle,* 2 November 1935.
[2] *RIBAJ,* 7 December 1935, p.134
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.

were also asbestos, as were the large corrugated tiles of the pitched roof.[5] Special cellular, asbestos roofing slabs were used for the flat roof of the ancillary buildings, and all of the roofs were insulated with asbestos/aluminium foil sheet.[6] When the manufacturers Williams and Williams Ltd used the nursery to advertise their metal windows, it was described as 'a unique asbestos-cement building'.[7]

Although fascinated by the potential of new materials and construction, Gibson was always concerned to find a suitable aesthetic expression. In 1936 he wrote 'the preconceived idea that semi-permanent construction must be of a somewhat “inferior” appearance must be refuted. Semi-permanent construction offers equal opportunities for good design to other forms'.[8] The aesthetic of the Hilary Haworth stood out against other contemporary design approaches (see Figure 24). The photographs which accompanied the review in *Education* served to highlight this visual difference, providing a comparison with the spreading verandahs of the Rachel McMillan Nursery, Wrotham, Kent 1936 (see Figure 25), and the heavy timber structure of the Lee Royd Nursery, Accrington, 1936 (see Figure 26).[9]

Externally the asbestos sheet was left undecorated, but the pitched roof was of specially prepared black asbestos tiles, 'made at the architect's request as a contrast between the natural grey of the walls and the blue paintwork'.[10] The silver-grey and black would have stood in marked contrast to the surrounding red-brick houses.

Internally the recommendations of the Hadow Report were evident. It called for 'fresh harmonious colours’ and a simple colour scheme, to ensure

[5] *RIBAJ,* 7 December 1935, p.134
[6] Ibid.
[7] 'Some Nursery Schools', *Education,* 24 July 1936, p.13
[8] Donald Gibson, 'Construction: some notes on recent developments' *AJ,* 28 May 1936, p.835.
[9] *Education,* 24 July 1936, pp.6-12 & 17
[10] CCRO. ZDES/35/9/1 *The Chronicle,* 2 November 1935.

that bright pictures would not clash with it, and that an increased amount of furniture would not make the scheme fragmentary (see Figure 23).[11] The natural colour of the asbestos was again utilized, with cover fillets on the ceiling painted white.[12] *The Chronicle* described the rooms as being 'painted in fresh gay colours, blue being predominant'.[13] In her book *The Nursery School,* McMillan had suggested strong blue or red woodwork.[14]

Wear and tear was an important consideration and floors were a tough magnesium oxychloride composition in green, grey and brown. The lower sections of the walls were protected by dados of patent decorative asbestos cement sheets, which were also used for the cubicle partitions in the toilets. *The Chronicle* noted that 'great attention had been paid to the hygienic qualities of the building'.[15] Apart from the impervious nature of the floors and dado, the radiators and flush doors had 'no dust collecting surfaces' and the junction of floor and wall was rounded so that dirt could not get into the corners.

Equal attention had been paid to the fittings and furniture. The paper noted the 'diminutive chairs and tables, the little toothbrushes […] tiny beds and blankets', but felt that 'perhaps the most remarkable features' of the nursery were the closets and cloakrooms. Here everything was 'constructed on a scale to meet the requirements of the children, including low setted [sic] wash basins […] and pegs […] bearing mugs and towels'.[16] The *AJ* commented that 'fittings and basins are kept very low'.[17] This noteworthy approach was evidence of the gradual shift towards basing education around the needs of the child.[18]

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[11] Hadow Report (1933), p.164
[12] *AJ,* 19 December 1935, pp.922-924
[13] CCRO. ZDES/35/9/1 *The Chronicle,* 2 November 1935.
[14] McMillan (1919), pp.33-42
[15] CCRO. ZDES/35/9/1 *The Chronicle,* 2 November 1935.
[16] Ibid.
[17] *AJ,* 19 December 1935, p.922
[18] It was only after the war (1945-48) that the first sanitary fittings were developed specifically for children in a collaboration between the Hertfordshire schools' architects, particularly Stirrat Johnson-Marshall, and manufacturers Adamsez Ltd of Newcastle: Saint (1989), pp.82-84

The Hadow Committee had cited construction costs for new nursery buildings ranging from £30 to £50 per child, with the lower costs being achieved in nurseries of 160 places or more.[19] It also recommended a floor area of 15 sq ft per pupil, more than the required minimum of 10 sq ft.[20] Gibson's design catered for only forty children yet provided 26 sq ft per pupil. The fact that the final building costs were in the middle of the range cited in the Hadow Report underlines the economy of the design.

In February 1938, the BRS carried out an inspection of the building on behalf of Turners Asbestos Cement Co. Their report found the building to be warm and comfortable, with no signs of deterioration. It was felt that some reconstruction may be needed in 20 to 30 years time, but their overall conclusion was that;

> The building is admirably suited for the particular requirements of a nursery school and no point of serious criticism has been found.[21]

3.1e. The significance of the building.

The Hadow Committee understood the need to disseminate their recommendations on best practice in nursery design through built examples and recommended that 'apart from purely social and economic considerations model nursery schools […] are educationally desirable, and […] should be made accessible to teachers from other schools'. [1]

The Hilary Haworth Nursery was described by the *RIBAJ* as 'a nursery school of the type which H.M. Government are proposing to build in very large numbers'.[2] Entries in the visitors' book for the nursery show widespread interest

[19] Hadow (1933), p.167
[20] In 1925 newly built infant schools were required to have 10 sq ft per pupil. Some experts consulted by the Hadow Committee recommended 20 sq ft: *Hadow* (1933), p.162 & 167
[21] CCRO. ZDES/35/4/13 BRS Report of Inspection, February 1938, p.7
[1] Hadow (1933), pp.187-188
[2] *RIBAJ,* 7 December 1935, p.134.

in the building, which may also suggest that it was being viewed as a possible model design.[3]

The nursery followed many of the recommendations in the Hadow Report, but differed significantly in terms of its proposed intake, floor area and design. The play rooms were not 'arranged as separate shelters' nor could 'three sides of every room […] be thrown entirely open'.[4] Nevertheless, the 'lightness of construction' and limited lifespan of the building exemplified the Committee's thoughts and Gibson's ideas on permanence in construction.[5] In his first published article in 1936, Gibson wrote:

> The question of permanency is one upon which the education authorities must make a decision. It must be recognized that many schools built less than 20 years ago are now out of date both in planning and accommodation and in fittings. It is probably safe to surmise that the same will be the case in the future, and a building with a useful life of 20 years, costing less than a building of more durable construction, would therefore be an advantage.[6]

Gibson was always fascinated by the potential of new materials, and new means of construction, to lead to improvements in design, performance and productivity.[7] While cost limitations certainly influenced the design of the Hilary Haworth, the choice of materials and construction, and the decision to take full advantage of the Board of Education's little used bye-laws exemption for new school buildings, were pure Gibson.

The Hilary Haworth nursery was an expression of his predominantly technical, rather than artistic, approach to architecture, a bias which is evident

[3] CCRO. ZDES/35/3. Visitors' book.
[4] Ibid., p.168-169
[5] Hadow (1933), p.166; Donald Gibson 'Planning Post-War Reconstruction', *Municipal Journal and Local Government Administrator,* 13 December 1940, p.1538 – 'Building science is advancing so rapidly that we have no right to build for a thousand years. A house should be regarded as permanent only for about 30 years, and should then be replaced by an up-to-date one. [...] all materials in a house should, if possible, be designed to live the same useful life, just as in a modern car''
[6] Donald Gibson, 'Construction: Some notes on recent developments', *AJ,* 28 May 1936, p.835
[7] See Saint (1987) for details on Gibson's Coventry schools and the development of the CLASP building system, and Sarah Shaw, 'Experimentation and Innovation in Coventry 1938-1955', MA Dissertation (Keele University, 1993), for an examination of Gibson's design and constructional developments in housing.

in his lecturing in construction at Liverpool School of Architecture, his early published papers and in his work for the BRS.

Gibson moved to the BRS at Watford before the Hilary Haworth opened in October 1935. Shortly after its opening, Gibson's new materials gallery was inaugurated at the Liverpool School of Architecture. Mention of the gallery appeared in the December edition of the *RIBAJ*, only a few pages after the report on the Nursery, but the Journal failed to make the link between the two.[8] In looking at the Hilary Haworth and at the purpose of the gallery, it is possible to see the first examples of a particular approach to architecture and construction and a belief in the importance of gathering and disseminating technical knowledge, which would come to typify Gibson's career.[9]

In his speech at the opening of the materials gallery, Dr R E Stradling, Director of the BRS, focussed on the essential links between the architect's knowledge and understanding of materials, and the future development of both architecture and the 'modernist'. Gibson would come to exemplify the kind of architect and approach Stradling believed was needed. The architect, he said, was an artist, not in one medium, but in many, and If his 'artistic ability was to have reasonable scope' then he had to be able to instinctively call upon a knowledge of materials.[10] Ensuring that architects had a good knowledge of materials required 'much more serious attention by the schools of architecture than it had received if the "modernist" was to have his fair chance'.[11]

While Stradling linked the aims of the new materials gallery at Liverpool to the future success and development of the modernist, the journal *Education*

[8] *RIBAJ,* 7 December 1935, p.158
[9] The building information library which he initiated and built up as part of the Coventry City Architect's Department was widely respected and open to all in the business of design and construction.
[10] *RIBAJ,* 7 December 1935, p.159
[11] Ibid.

made a similar link in its discussion of the Hilary Haworth Nursery. Its article opened with a reference to Frank Pick's recent review of *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus* by Gropius.[12] Pick had described the book as:

> a plea for thinking out afresh all the problems of building in terms of current materials and current tools, tools which have become elaborated into machines. It asks what the past did for wood and brick and stone, the present shall do for steel, concrete and glass.[13]

In beginning the report with this reference the implication was that Gibson's nursery design answered that plea, presenting fresh thinking and a new approach to the use of current materials.

So far as the journal *Education* knew it was 'the first all-asbestos-cement nursery school in the country'.[14] It did not, however, mention the importance of the building as a design experiment, and a model in combining new educational ideas with new materials. Only the *AJ,* in May 1936, alluded to the building's wider significance. In its review of new school buildings, from Europe and America, the importance of Gibson's building was suggested in the placing of the tiny nursery alongside innovative and experimental projects such as Lurcat's school at Villejuif, Richard Neutra's aluminium sheathed school in Los Angeles and Beaudoin and Lods' open air school at Suresnes.[15]

In addition to the novelty of the building materials, the Hilary Haworth employed largely dry construction. It marked the beginning of Gibson’s quest to find constructional and material solutions which would increase building productivity by lessening the susceptibility of the building industry to inclement weather and removing the delays inherent in the traditional wet trades of bricklaying and plastering.[16]

[12] *Education,* 24 July 1936, p.17
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] *AJ,* 28 May 1936, p.812.
[16] In 1962 Gibson was appointed Director General of Research and Development at the Ministry of Public Building and Works, his brief being 'to increase output in [building] without a

Despite the widespread interest in the building and evidence that it may have been considered a model nursery, there seems to have been no immediate rush to emulate it.[17] When a small nursery of similar non-traditional construction opened in 1937, only twenty miles to the east of Lache, at Northwich, Cheshire, it was, as its architect Sir Leslie Martin later recalled, still 'at that time rather unusual to build a school with some standardized products and dry construction'.[18]

The last entry in the nursery's visitors' book is for March 1959, by which time the building had just passed the 20 years useful life which Gibson had proposed in his 1936 paper on developments in construction.[19] As Saint noted, the nursery had provided 'a first tentative realisation' of 'the English movement for light and dry, prefabricated, architect-designed schools', but importantly it was also a 'first tentative realisation' of the architectural ethos which would underpin Gibson's future career.[20]

In 1963 a short item in *The Observer* noted that the Ministry of Public Building and Works was studying 'the development of a new type of prefabricated building with internal walls of hollow plastic partitions filled with water'. It was, the paper said, an idea which had originated with Sir Donald Gibson, 'one of the pioneers of industrialized building in this country'.[21] Six years before his retirement, Gibson was clearly still innovating and pushing the boundaries of architectural technology, a pioneering approach first manifest in the tiny Hilary Haworth Nursery.

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proportionate rise in costs' : *Observer,* 11 November 1962, p.5; In 1963 he was given the responsibility of coordinating action to reduce time lost by the building industry to winter conditions: *Guardian,* 26 October 1963, p.1

[17] *RIBAJ,* 7 December 1935, p.134.

[18] *RIBAJ,* August 1973, p.381 & 383; see also Alan Powers, *Modern: the Modern Movement in Britain*, (London & New York: Merrell Publishers, 2007), pp.180-182

[19] *AJ,* 28 May 1936, p.835

[20] Saint (1987), p.50

[21] *Observer,* 31 March 1963, p.3

3.2. Spence and The Empire Exhibition, Bellahouston Park, Glasgow, 1938.

> Exhibitions are like hot-houses, where new seeds are planted and forced: every good garden has a hot-house.
>
> Basil Spence PRIBA (1958)[1]

Gibson's first professional commission, the Hilary Haworth Nursery, neatly encapsulates his architectural philosophy and provides a manifesto for his career. Spence cannot so easily be narrowed down to one building. His varied portfolio of work from the 1930s reveals his great versatility and imagination, his concern with materials and craftsmanship and his ability to envisage projects as a unified whole, down to interior décor and furniture.

As has been shown, Spence's intuitive response to an architectural brief and his ability to assess swiftly the requirements of the programme were combined with remarkable artistic fluency. He was able to produce unified schemes within a very short space of time and the considered nature of those first ideas meant that final designs often remained remarkably true to the initial concept, retaining a spontaneity and freshness in execution.

It was this ability which brought him such success as an exhibition designer and the 1938 Empire Exhibition, Glasgow is perhaps the project which best showcases his versatility and range of interests.

The success of the Scottish Everyday Art Exhibition, held in Edinburgh in 1936, marked Spence out as a particularly thoughtful and innovative exhibition designer.[2] Although the exhibition featured the work of trade associations, its purpose was at heart educational; 'it represented a link between those

[1] Basil Spence, 'Inaugural Address of the President', *RIBAJ* Vol.62 (December 1958), p.46
[2] Elizabeth Cumming, 'Scottish everyday art, or how tradition shaped modernism', *Journal of the Scottish Society for Art History,* Vol 9 (2004), pp.55-62

responsible for education and those who controlled industry. It was their aim to educate the public to appreciate and demand things of good design, and to urge industry to employ good designers'.[3]

Spence was responsible for the exhibition design and the selection of items for display. He also oversaw the construction of the stands. Exhibits were arranged according to material and amongst the eighteen sections of the display were four modern room settings, presenting the very best in modern Scottish furniture and fittings. The exhibition encapsulated Spence's belief that the truly modern grew naturally from tradition, and that 'one must design afresh and with vitality if one wants to be a traditionalist'.[4]

The success of the Scottish Everyday Art Exhibition led to the design of the Scottish Pavilion for the Johannesburg Empire Exhibition and brought Spence to the attention of Thomas Tait. In 1936 the Scottish National Development Council had begun planning for the Empire Exhibition to be held at Bellahouston Park, Glasgow, in 1938. Tait had been appointed architect-in-chief with responsibility for picking the team of designers and coordinating work on the 174 acre site.[5] His choice of designers brought in people who had a connection with Burnet Tait & Lorne as well as the very best of the new generation, men such as Spence.[6] Edwards notes that Tait 'admired Spence's distinctive blend of Scandinavian modernism and Scottish romanticism […] Tait also liked Spence's flair and personality, believing it suited this type of work, which relied upon its popular appeal'.[7]

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[3] Lord Elgin's opening speech reported in *Guardian,* 7 May 1936, p.12
[4] 'The Coventry Church of St Michael, Coventry', *RIBAJ,* February 1955, p.145
[5] Thomas Smith Tait, *DSA*, http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=200729 [accessed 12 December 2008]; http://www.empireexhibition1938.co.uk [accessed 26 February 2009]
[6] Tait was one of Spence's sponsors when he applied for Fellowship of the RIBA: Application in Spence's Biographical File, RIBA Library.
[7] Edwards in Long & Thomas (2007), p.49

For reasons of economy and speed of construction Tait stipulated that standardised materials should be used across the site. The timber and steel framing would be clad with 4' x 4' asbestos panels and this dictated the module for doors and windows. The use of asbestos sheeting in building was a fairly modern phenomenon, and as well as being light weight and weather resistant, also dictated that the overall effect of the pavilions would be modern.

Spence became job architect for the two Scottish Pavilions on the north of the site; he was also commissioned by the CAI to design a house for their display of domestic architecture and furnishing, which was to be sited near a replica Clachan to the north-east of the site. Spence also entered, and won, a limited competition to design the pavilion for Imperial Chemical Industries. This would prove to be his most memorable contribution to the exhibition.

The major feature of the exhibition was Tait's 'Tower of Empire', which stood on the high ground at the centre of the site (see Figure 31). Robert Mallet-Stevens' Tourist Pavilion at the 1925 Paris Exhibition seems to have provided the inspiration for the Art Deco Tower of Empire, and that was in turn reflected in the twin Scottish Pavilions (see Figure 27).

The official guide to the exhibition credited Spence with the interior decoration of the north Scottish Pavilion.[8] While he acknowledged Tait's collaboration in the design, he later took credit for the bulk of the interior and exterior conception of both pavilions and they are now viewed as being largely his work.[9] The pavilions, with their clean lines and areas of full-height glazing, had an almost industrial feel and might have been taken for modern factories had it not been for the slender towers, with their flagpoles and masts, and the huge coat of arms over the entrance. With a blue and white colour scheme

[8] RCAHMS *Empire Exhibition Official Guide 1938* p.115
[9] Edwards in Long & Thomas (2007), p.49

reflecting the saltire flag, the pavilions were redolent of clean, efficient, productive modernity, very much the image which Scotland wished to present to its people, the nation and abroad. They were very much a testament to Spence's ability to interpret a client's needs and aspirations and to give them subtle architectural expression

The slender towers of each building echoed the form of Tait's Tower and this motif was reflected across the site in other pavilions and structures. The massing of the buildings, which Edwards feels was probably influenced by Tait, was similar to the British Pavilion, designed by H J Rowse, but in comparison Spence achieved a much lighter and less dominant effect. The feeling conveyed by the entrances to each was also very different. That of the British Pavilion resembled a contemporary art deco cinema entrance, but also had the powerful presence and form of a castle barbican through which visitors entered, reminded of the might of Empire. In the Scottish Pavilions the pronounced stepping of each section up towards the tower drew visitors naturally towards an entrance which had a less dominating aspect, conveying the sense that visitors were not necessarily entering to be entertained, but to learn. This was perhaps emphasised by the sculptures of great Scotsmen which stood on corbals to the west of the entrance: the literary figures of Robert Burns, Thomas Carlyle, and Sir Walter Scott, the scientist James Watt and the explorer Dr Livingstone.[10]

Education was certainly the purpose of the displays in the north pavilion which contained the hall of health and planning and the hall of education. The guide book praised the 'fascinating arrangements of the exhibits in this pavilion' which it believed 'discredited' the idea 'that public services are not capable of

[10] Cumming (2004), p.60

interesting presentation'.[11] 'Artists, architects and craftsmen' noted the guide, 'have pooled their efforts to produce a display that is at once illuminating and attractive'.[12]

Although Spence was not involved with the contents of the displays, they are worth considering briefly because they highlight the prevailing concerns of the time. In the north Scottish pavilion, the exhibition followed a sequence showing how 'statutory services embrace the entire people', running from family to community, then to the nation.[13] The *Official Guide* found the infant welfare and town planning displays to be 'particularly striking'.

The United Kingdom Government Pavilion, with its display by Misha Black, carried the same message. A Board of Education display illustrated the 'revolution which has taken place within recent years both in school buildings and in what happens at school', and models included a nursery school.[14] 'Good Housing' focussed on the successes of slum clearance and presented a diorama of a typical LCC estate.[15] Very much in keeping with Spence's ideas the exhibit also warned against the needless destruction of the old and showed how the new architecture could harmonise with and pay its respects to the old.[16]

Spence's skills as a designer and his facility with materials are evident when comparing the Scottish Pavilions with his commission for the CAI. This display at the exhibition was intended to 'stimulate public interest in design in the things of every-day use, and to show examples of good design in such things of Scottish manufacture' and it took the form of a 'country house' and 'two working-class flats out of a tenement building'.[17]

[11]RCAHMS *Empire Exhibition Official Guide 1938* p.115
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] RCAHMS D12.41 EXH 'The United Kingdom Government Pavilion', p.15
[15] Ibid., p.19
[16] Ibid., p.19
[17] Scottish Committee of the Council for Art and Industry (SCCAI), *Domestic architecture and furnishing: Empire Exhibition, Scotland – 1938*, (n.p.: SCCAI, 1938), p.3

The site occupied by the exhibits was close to the replica Highland Village, 'An Clachan': a picturesque grouping of white walled, thatched cottages, and a castle and cottage ruins around a small loch, complete with painted scenery of distant mountains. Part of the exhibit was a display of some typical three and four room flats, designed by R Mervyn Noad, which were intended to show how the design of working class flats could be improved and how they could be furnished. Spence was required to design a country house which would provide a domestic setting for the best in contemporary Scottish furniture and fittings. He responded with a house which provided a link between the historic clachan and the modernity of the rest of the exhibition site, bringing together a sense of traditional Scottish architecture and the benefits of modern living.

The *Official Guide* to the exhibition described the building as a 'country house which could be built anywhere' and noted that while it embodied 'all practical modern conveniences its aim [was] to retain the characteristics of Scottish domestic architecture'.[18] The guide continued 'sunlight has been the main consideration, and all the rooms are well-proportioned and airy'.

Spence's original perspective drawing of the house shows a robust, two-storey house, with a steeply pitched, pantiled roof set between the skews of the gable ends (see Figure 28). The front elevation is dominated by the chimney which projects at a right-angle to the house, about two thirds of the way along the front elevation, sheltering the front entrance and supporting a large canopy which provides further protection from the elements. On the opposite side of the chimney the roof extends in a catslide, bringing the eaves down to the front face of the chimney, at the same level as the canopy. Three fairly small, square windows are tucked under the first floor eaves.[19]

[18] RCAHMS *Empire Exhibition Official Guide 1938,* p.214
[19] RCAHMS DP 027016 Spence drawing 1937

From this drawing to the final construction, the external detailing remained virtually unchanged; however, the plan was reversed and the final structure was a mirror image of the initial conception. Looking at the siting of the house it seems most probable that this change was made because of its proximity to the Ibrox entrance to the site. For visitors from this direction the house was one of the first exhibits they would pass and the chimney and canopied front entrance would have appeared more inviting than the gable end wall of the house.

With its pitched roof, red pantiles, skews and white harled walls the house sat comfortably within Scottish tradition and Spence drew on 18th century Scottish architecture for the scrolled skewputs. The prominent chimney stack would become a feature of many Spence designs and echoed the work of his mentor Lutyens. It was a comfortable modern house which grew from a long architectural tradition, but did not seek to copy it, and perfectly represented Spence's view that 'that the true traditionalists are people who think simply in their own era'.[20] The sense that the house grew from a tradition added to its sense of solidity and permanence, but this building was in fact no different to any of the others on the site: it was not harled brick or stone, as it appeared to be, but asbestos cement sheeting on a framework.[21]

A model of the house shows that the cottage-like character of the front elevation, with its small windows and catslide roof, did not continue to the rear elevation. Here the house had a more modern and slightly more imposing appearance, with larger windows overlooking the garden, and the first floor windows sitting above the line of the eaves as shed dormers.[22] The narrow horizontal panes of the metal framed windows accentuated its modernity.

[20] Basil Spence (1962), p.9
[21] SCCAI (1938), pp.4-5
[22] RCAHMS Photographs C33158-61

Inside the house, Spence was responsible for selecting the furnishings, fittings and decor, and it was here that the real purpose of the exhibit lay. The foreword to the CAI guide noted that a high standard of industrial design depended not only on manufacturers, but also 'on the interest and discrimination of the general public'.[23] Design was 'no less important in an egg cup than in the craftsman's masterpiece, and there may be – and should be – good design in everything we use in the home; in the cheapest as well as the most expensive things'.[24] Given Spence's discerning taste and his experience as a domestic architect choosing furniture and fittings, there is no doubt that the inside of the house would have presented the very best in design, from kitchen to bathroom and sitting rooms to bedrooms. The provision of parquet floors and veneered sycamore panels for the staircase gives some indication of the quality of internal fittings.[25]

The CAI display showed Spence's innate ability to take the essence of a traditional architecture and create something new from it, adding an additional layer to tradition rather than slavishly copying. In the Scottish Pavilions he had created buildings which carried a seductive sense of the progressive Scottish nation, capable, innovative and resourceful. His third commission, for the ICI pavilion exemplified his innovative and imaginative approach to design, his delight in experimenting with forms, his collaboration with artists and his appreciation of the qualities of materials.

The ICI pavilion had been allocated a prominent position at the centre of the site, lying on the axis of the main entrance, alongside the South Cascade and close to the huge 'Palace of Engineering'. Spence's response was to create a fairly small but eye catching structure which was widely regarded as

[23] SCCAI (1938), p.3
[24] Ibid., p.3
[25] Ibid., p.5

being the most successful of the many pavilion designs (see Figure 29). When *The Observer* reported on the exhibition, prior to its Royal opening, it picked out several buildings for special mention, but only one designer's name appeared in the whole report: 'Mr Basil Spence', whose 'building it is impossible to miss in the view from Bellahouston Hill'.[26]

Spence took his inspiration from the company's products and the four elements of air, earth, water and fire and he brought them together in a tight geometrical composition based on interlocking circles. An axonometric section of the interior is the only drawing which exists for this pavilion (see Figure 30). The watercolour shows the 'interior treatment' of the pavilion, but it unlikely that Spence's clients would have fully understood its complexity.[27] It would have had no useful purpose as a working drawing and it seems more likely that it was intended to show the clients that they had commissioned a talented and innovative designer who would provide a cutting edge design, encapsulating the intricacies of science and technology.

Visitors approaching the ICI pavilion from the main entrance came to a crescent shaped pond, into which large frogs made of copper sheet spouted water. At the rear of the pool a free-standing pylon of nickel, copper, and brass rods, with an encircling metal strip, represented the company's interest in non-ferrous metals (see Figure 29). Behind this stood a triangle of three further pylons, prismatic in form, with concave sides dictated by the interlocking circles of the ground plan. Each of these pylons bore relief sculptures representing the elements of earth, fire and water. The sculptures were created by Thomas Whalen, whom Spence knew from ECA and who had also produced a large

[26] *Observer,* 24 April 1938, p.21
[27] RCAHMS DP012217. The perspective is attributed to Spence but is unsigned. Clive Fenton believes that it is more probably the work of Kininmonth who produced similar projections. It does stand out from the more usual presentation drawings which Spence prepared for clients and it seems unlikely that Spence would have left a work of such quality unsigned.

sculpture for the north Scottish Pavilion. Whalen would work with Spence several times notably for the Festival of Britain.

The three pylons, finished in ICI's new plastics, were linked together by curved rods of cupro-nickel, again highlighting one of the company's interests. In photographs of the pavilion, many of which have Tait's Tower in the background, the spacing of the curved rods closely echoes the horizontal banding on the Tower (see Figure 31). Spence's eye for such details and his ability to pick up on and utilise rhythms makes it unlikely that this similarity was accidental.

Effectively clasped by the pylons was a crescent shaped entrance vestibule, in which visitors were introduced to the products of the company. Chemicals were 'displayed in a novel way by the ingenious use of lighting' and dyestuffs were 'suggested by an endless variety of colour patterns shown through fluorescent light'.[28] Two other exhibits showed 'the curious light transmitting powers of the ICI transparent plastic "Perspex"'.[29]

From the vestibule, visitors entered a circular area which linked the outer circles of the pool and entrance way to the display hall. From here, at night, a two-hundred feet high searchlight represented the fourth element of fire. This also lit a fountain which symbolised the dyestuffs which were a product of the company. The main display hall was cylindrical and top-lit. Externally, with no windows and almost no ornament, it resembled an oil or chemical storage tank, and it is probable that the overall design of the pavilion was generated by this symbolic shape.

Once inside the main hall, visitors were met with another innovative approach from Spence. There were no didactic or commercial displays of ICI

[28] RCAHMS *Empire Exhibition Official Guide 1938* p.221
[29] Ibid., p.221

products cluttering the space; instead dioramas illustrated some of the uses of ICI chemicals in industry and agriculture. From the centre of the hall, stairs went up to the main display gallery which was octagonal in shape. Here, under different headings, the story of ICI was told in mural paintings by Donald Moodie and Robert Westwater.

The pavilion was a masterful design. It presented ICI as a modern, progressive and innovative company at the cutting edge of technology and it advertised their products through the materials of the structure itself. The overt symbolism of the sculptured decoration and the underlying symbolism of the overall design reinforced the message, and the strict geometry, which underpinned the planning of the whole design, unified the various elements. The theme of interlocking circles also suggested chemical bonds and interactions.

The Empire Exhibition gave Spence a perfect opportunity to show his great versatility and fertile imagination and, although he was not to have known it at the time, it provided an important element in his CV which would keep him employed on exhibition work after the war, at a time when other architectural work was in short supply.

4. The role and status of the architect: War years.

By the outbreak of the Second World War, publicly employed architects made up 31% of the profession.[1] Issues of status and architectural responsibility were unresolved and adequate representation was still being sought within the RIBA. The war encouraged the profession to act, or appear to act, as a unified body and overt hostility between the public sector and the RIBA lessened, but did not cease.

Architects found commissions dwindling as private building was curtailed, and the profession began to realise that despite its efforts to promote the role and status of the architect, the public still seemed 'unaware that he is anything more than a draughtsman'.[2] The RIBA's overtures to the Government offering advice and expertise were largely ignored and it was not even given a place on the Government's advisory committee on the building industry until the end of 1942.[3] The Government's 'haphazard treatment of architecture as a reserved occupation' reinforced that view that architecture was not considered an essential occupation.[4] Initially architects over the age of twenty-five were expected to find employment in works for the armed forces and for industry, however, work which architects saw as theirs by right of training and experience went instead to large contracting firms. Eventually architects were removed entirely from the list of reserved occupations.

In the February 1940 edition of *Keystone*, R D Manning wrote about public perceptions of the architect's role and status. He accused the RIBA of creating a situation in which the profession was not recognised as having an

[1] Hugh McIlveen, 'The Architecture Business: the changing nature of Architectural Practice in Britain. 1945-1995, MA Thesis (University of Warwick, 1998), p.61
[2] E Stanley Hall, 1939, quoted in Jackson (1970), p.78
[3] Jackson (1970), p.79
[4] Jackson (1970), p.78

essential place in the building industry and architects were viewed merely as 'artistic gentlemen who add trimmings to expensive buildings':[5]

> The Institute […] has, by remaining under the influence of men who are blind to social and economic developments of the last 30-40 years, dug a ditch between its members and the people, which cannot be bridged by its genteel exhibitions and timid lectures to children, by its correspondence campaigns in the rarefied atmosphere of *The Times*'.[6]

The implication was that, while the Institute's elitist stance had divorced it from the public, AASTA understood the realities of life and had the necessary communication skills. The statement also hinted at an ideological division between AASTA and the RIBA on the issue of planning for reconstruction. At the start of the war the RIBA had formed a small committee to examine the future use of the profession, but in theorising about the future it avoided direct engagement with the realities of the present, AASTA believed that dealing with the present was 'the only basis for sound future planning'.[7] What Manning did not admit was that this approach was causing divisions within the Association itself, a point which will be examined more fully in considering the 'Coventry of Tomorrow' exhibition.

The war marked a critical turning point in the balance of power between the public and private sectors. Architecture became the principal means of social transformation; it became the right of the masses, rather than the prerogative of the few. Political and legislative changes effectively put architectural patronage and control into the hands of local authorities, and official departments grew in size while private architects struggled with restricted building licenses and materials rationing.

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[5] *Keystone*, February 1940, p.11
[6] Ibid.
[7] MRC. MSS.78/BT/4/1/15(ii) What of the Future?: A statement of AASTA policy on plans for reconstruction (1941), p.4

This chapter will consider the links between AASTA and Gibson's new Coventry Department, both through Gibson's adoption of group-working and his department's support of the Association. It will explore AASTA's policy on planning for post-war reconstruction and then look at the ways in which Gibson and his team began to develop their ideas for the 'Future Coventry'. Following the blitz these ideas were embraced as part of Government propaganda and while the city centre reconstruction plans and the bombed Cathedral became international symbols of hope for the future, Gibson and Coventry's leaders had to battle against Government and local business interests to ensure that a modern city centre would rise from the ashes.

4.1. The AASTA and 'group working'.

> One is apt to come up against a certain impersonal and petty tyranny.
>
> Anon., 1938.[1]

With very few exceptions, the increased employment of architects within local authorities failed to initiate changes in long established departmental structures. When AASTA published its *Charter for Architectural Assistants Employed in Public Offices*, in 1938, its complaint was familiar:

> Although the standing of most professional men is understood and respected by public authorities, that of the architect is neither well-defined nor generally admitted. An exceedingly large number of qualified architects are employed under engineers and surveyors. They receive instructions from them, have their work altered and criticised by them, and must eventually submit to all credit being taken by them – without, in the majority of instances, any acknowledgement being made.[2]

[1]Anon., 'Beginnings', *A&BN,* 21 October 1938, p.67
[2]PJMC GB 0237/PJM/ABT/G *A Charter for Architectural Assistants Employed in Public Offices*, (AASTA, 1938), p.2

From the mid 1930s AASTA had actively promoted the introduction of the 'group system' of working as a means of giving assistants greater responsibility, experience and job satisfaction. In group working the office was split into small groups, each headed by an architect and a chief assistant, with one to six assistants working under their auspices. Each group oversaw jobs from beginning to end, there was full discussion of all work and new ideas were encouraged. This contrasted with the 'factory system' which was highly subdivided and could lead to an assistant only ever experiencing one particular facet of the design process.[3]

The group system, with shared responsibility and greater equality of input into the design process, was in accord with general moves towards a more egalitarian society, a point made in 1936 by Maxwell Fry who felt that it fitted the social scheme.[4] AASTA Secretary Barr had noted, however, that while some of the more progressive architectural schools were beginning to tackle research and design on a group basis, 'there were few offices which had ever attempted anything of the sort'.[5]

In March 1939 *Keystone* published an article by Manning entitled 'Groups. A plea for up-to-date organisation in large public offices, for the breaking up of bureaucracy, for improved conditions of service and for the treatment of responsible assistants *as architects*'.[6] In it he examined the defects in the current system, the essential features of good group working and the benefits to be gained from it. The organisation of Coventry's Architect's Department followed the recommended model in almost every detail.

[3] *Keystone,* June 1938, pp.25-26
[4] MRC MSS.78/BT/10/1/2 *The Surveyor,* 6 November 1936
[5] *Keystone,* December 1936, p.114.
[6] *Keystone,* March 1939, pp.3-5

Manning believed that the maintenance of existing hierarchies had helped to maintain the idea of the independent principal as the 'big shot'. Principals for official departments were chosen on seniority and they were not men to experiment either technically or administratively.

> The architect is designer, organiser, paymaster and general cock of the walk, and recognised as being solely responsible for the work emanating from his office, the assistant being literally no more than his name implies.[7]

Maintaining the dominance of the principal tended towards subordination of other staff and affected the quality of work produced. Design and technical matters were subject to one man's ideas and with a lack of contact, little discussion and inadequate supervision, mistakes could arise as second-hand information was passed on by people who did not know the job:

> The results of the system are only too plain in mediocre design, obsolete technical methods, expensive building, muddle, inflated salaries for one or two with inadequate salaries for the majority, discipline by intimidation, promotion via dead men's shoes or by favouritism, with its inevitable consequence, toadyism.[8]

Problems did not just accrue for employees within this system, employers also lost out; with the principal acting as a buffer between the department and the council, it was impossible for councillors to judge whether they were getting a proper service or not.

Manning then moved on to the mechanics and benefits of the 'group system'. Ideally a group would consist of around six men; ten to eleven was the maximum before efficiency suffered. They should be of varying abilities and should work together all the time, operating much as a private office did.

The senior member of the group should have an appropriate rank, would attend committee meetings and decide on specifications and quantities. His

[7] Ibid., p.3
[8] *Keystone,* March 1939, p.4

group's responsibility for the jobs allotted to it would be acknowledged and this direct involvement in the design process would reduce the likelihood of mistakes arising through lack of continuity and project knowledge. Improved standards of design would also result from competition between groups.

Salary frameworks would be restructured as the 'principal and subordinate' system was killed off and , if the 'inflated salaries' of principals were abolished, group leaders would be able to attain higher levels of pay and in turn lower grades would benefit.

At the top of the group system should be an administrative architect who would maintain coherence in the office as a whole and ensure that jobs were properly fed out to the groups, 'his function should be definitely co-operative rather than autocratic'.[9]

In conclusion Manning believed that the group system offered the potential to make 'official employment what it very plainly is not now, a national architectural service which the community would soon learn to value, in which any architect could feel happy and proud to work.[10]

[9] *Keystone,* March 1939, p.5
[10] Ibid.

4.2. Coventry City Architect's Department, 1939.

> The "all-in" office, well laid out, with a man at
> the head who is not necessarily a brilliant designer
> but knows enough about everything to run the show,
> is the pattern most likely to form in the future […]
> In the "official" field it is already crystallizing.
>
> John Summerson, 1942.[1]

On January 2nd 1939, the *Midland Daily Telegraph* (*MDT*) reported that Mr Gibson, Coventry's first Municipal Architect had started work. Two days later the Mayor, Alderman Stringer, welcomed the new City Architect saying that 'when his department got into its stride it would be a valuable addition to the Council's services'.[2]

The formation of the new department was one of the first major policy decisions of the newly elected Labour Council, and the decision 'in the interests of the city' was agreed by the Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) on July 11th 1938.[3] The PAC had been set up by the powerful triumvirate of Councillors George Hodgkinson, Sidney Stringer and George Halliwell and it was an administrative mechanism which had no precedent in municipal government. Ostensibly it would oversee the city's capital expenditure, co-ordinating and prioritising all council proposals, but to Hodgkinson the committee was a 'hammer and anvil', 'a media for social change'.[4]

The resolution to create an Architect's Department was notable because it appeared to go against the general downturn in building brought about by the government focus on rearmament; AASTA's employment register in December

[1] Summerson (1942), p.238
[2] *MDT,* 4 January 1939
[3] CHC PAC minutes. 11/7/38, p.1514
[4] Hodgkinson (1970), p.132 and 134

1938 showed that as Gibson prepared to start work private firms were dismissing staff:

> Very few local authorities are taking on new men (except odd authorities in the out-of-the-way districts) and the centre of gravitation for all those who cannot find work elsewhere is HM Office of Works, the Air Ministry and the various Departments of the War Office.[5]

The decision to create an autonomous office, rather than placing the architectural staff within the City Engineer's Department, was also notable. The Council, however, made a radical break with established practice in the man they appointed as City Architect; not someone of long service and seniority, but the thirty year old Deputy County Architect for the Isle of Ely, a man with little local authority experience.[6] As Manning commented in *Keystone* this cut 'right across the cherished official delusion that the older a man and the longer service he can claim in official service, the fitter he becomes for responsibility'.[7]

What Manning did not point out was that Coventry had made a policy decision to exclude the 'men of long service' from the very start, stipulating that the age limit for applicants should be 40.[8] The implication of this decision was clear: Coventry's leaders wanted someone who had been through fairly recent architectural training, who understood the wider social possibilities of architecture and who would bring new ideas and theories to bear on the city. They required someone who shared their vision, ethos, aspirations, enthusiasm and commitment, in other words, someone who would work with them rather than for them.

The decision of the PAC did not receive unanimous approval. The fact that the Council were contemplating a staff of twenty-four for the new department

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[5] *Keystone,* December 1938, p.4
[6] Gibson was chosen from 69 applicants: CHC Estates and Parliamentary (E&PC) Committee Minutes 23 August 1938.
[7] *Keystone,* July 1939, p.24
[8] PAC Minutes. 11 July 1938, p.1515

with no idea of costs was met with 'amazement'. Cllr Lee Gordon moved that appointments should not be made until the Finance Committee had reported on the cost implications for the next financial year. The motion was lost by thirty-three votes to twenty-four.[9]

Local private architects were also understandably dismayed at the foreseeable loss of work and the *MDT* reported that one of them felt that 'it will be a severe blow to some […] Quantity Surveyors, too, will be hit'. It was also believed that the costs to the city would prove to be greater than under the former tendering system. Somewhat surprisingly however, given the general antipathy between the public and private sectors, Coventry's private architects welcomed Gibson's appointment:

> Practically every architect in the city not only welcomes the change but gives a whole-hearted and sincere welcome to the City Architect […] "Coventry, or any other city for that matter, could not have a better man at the head of its architectural department than Mr Gibson," said a well-known Coventry architect. "He is a first-class man, fully trained in town planning, and above all he has a great love for municipal work. It is that last quality, together with his distinct ability that makes him so valuable. In private practice he would have been immensely successful." […] "If Mr Gibson is given full charge of the re-planning of the city – and we hope that this is what will happen – extra cost will be a minor consideration."[10]

The radical policy decision of the Council, their determined stance on the creation of the new department, and the appointment of Gibson, seems to have set up a general expectation among the profession that the office would depart from established precedent in its internal organisation. Nearly seven hundred applications were received for the eighteen available posts and while the downturn in the building market probably accounted for a proportion of these, Manning believed another more important factor was at play, 'there is little

[9] *MDT,* 6 December 1938.
[10] *MDT,* 12 January 1939.

doubt, […] that the hope of an atmosphere different from that of existing offices was the main cause of such an astonishing rush of applicants'.[11]

A note in *Keystone*, April 1939, supported this view. The *Manchester Guardian* had reported that local authorities were having difficulty getting assistants: 'in some cases they have had no response at all to advertisements, and it often happens that only two or three offer themselves for appointment'. As the writer noted, 'this is interesting in view of the 700 applicants for the architectural posts at Coventry'.[12]

The Council decided that George Edwards, Chief Architectural Assistant to the City Engineer, Ernest Ford, would become Gibson's deputy, a pragmatic move which brought an element of continuity and a wealth of local knowledge to the new department and ensured a line of communication with the City Engineer. Five other staff from the Engineer's Department moved with him, including Gwyn Morris who would become an active member of AASTA and a long serving member of the RIBA Council. [13]

Gibson's handling of the remaining appointments drew praise from AASTA, and confirmed that a very different approach to organisation could reasonably be anticipated:

> A valuable innovation was that candidates were asked to state in writing three buildings they liked and to give their reasons. Adequate expenses were paid to the candidates invited to be interviewed, and letters have since been sent to the unsuccessful ones thanking them for their applications and informing them of the names of successful candidates. Such courtesy is too rare to be passed over without a word. It surely augurs well for the future success of the new department, and good conditions of employment for assistants.[14]

[11] *Keystone,* March 1939, p.23
[12] *Keystone,* April 1939, p.2
[13] CHC E&PC Minutes 24 October 1938, p161
[14] *Keystone,* February 1939, p.2

The recruitment of 'more self-consciously radical architects' set the tenor of the department, swiftly earning it a reputation for its 'progressive views'.[15] It was a reputation which Gibson maintained throughout his tenure and which would continue with the appointment of Arthur Ling as his successor in 1955.

The Coventry department, described by David Percival as a 'powerhouse of brains', became, in effect, an unofficial training ground and clearing house for many of the leading names in post-war architecture, planning and architectural education.[16] Staff included: Brian Bunch, Deputy Architect and Planner for Stevenage New Town; Fred Pooley, County Architect for Buckinghamshire; David Percival, Norwich City Architect; Wilfred Burns, Newcastle City Planning Officer; John Barker, Bedfordshire County Architect; Percy Johnson-Marshall, Professor of Urban Design and Regional Planning, University of Edinburgh; Alan Harris, Professor of Concrete Structures, Imperial College London.

With the new department established, Gibson and the majority of his staff joined AASTA. July's *Keystone* noted that 'Mr P.E.J.Marshall has established a House Branch in the City Architect's Department'.[17] In the same edition of the journal, Manning was able to report that 'an event has occurred in the official architectural world which is a portent'. Coventry City Council, a council 'evidently […] imbued with imagination' had appointed a new City Architect, 'not a man in the forties with years of experience in local government offices, such as is usually appointed to these posts […] but a man of 31'.[18]

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[15] Nick Tiratsoo, *Reconstruction Affluence and Labour Politics: Coventry 1945-60* (London, New York: Routledge, 1990), p.9; *MDT,* 16 June 1939.
[16] Horsey & Muthesius *Provincial Mixed Development: The Design and Construction of Norwich Council Housing Under David Percival 1955-1973*. (Norwich, 1986) p.14. Percival joined Gibson's department in December 1953 as Deputy City Architect. He took over as Acting City Architect for the first five months of 1955, became Deputy to Arthur Ling and left Coventry in December 1955. He was an outspoken President of the ABT from 1942-1945.
[17] *Keystone,* July 1939, p.3
[18] *Keystone,* November 1939, p.23

At an informal RIBA lecture in 1947, Gibson recalled some of his thoughts on setting up the new department. He had wanted to create 'a pleasant place to live in, not only for me, but for the people who were going to work with me.'[19] His use of the words 'with me' rather than 'for me', summed up his whole approach, as a former Coventry architect has commented 'you were a member of his team and he would treat you as such'.[20] Gibson said he did not seek to recruit individuals 'because we are, and will be a team in the department', instead he sought 'people who are the right sort of people'.[21]

In June, Manning and Barr visited the Coventry office and Manning's report for *Keystone* clearly illustrates how closely the department mirrored the model set out in his article 'Groups: A plea for up-to-date organisation' and AASTA's *Charter for Architectural Assistants*.[22]

The pay structure was the first point of note; while the senior grades were 'not too generously paid', 'the enormous gap between the salary of the Chief Architect and those of the rest of his staff, usually a feature of official offices, does not occur here'. As Manning had predicted, the benefits of this more equitable remuneration were 'reflected in the relations between the chief and his subordinates.'[23] Also noteworthy was the establishment of the technical staff on a permanent basis. This was a 'new departure' from general practice 'and a very welcome one'.[24]

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[19] 'Architects to Public Authorities', *RIBAJ,* June 1947, p.404
[20] Douglas Chalk. Letter to the author 7 March 2006
[21] 'Architects to Public Authorities', *RIBAJ,* June 1947, p.405; Bill Glare, chief schools' architect in the department, raced motorcycles as a hobby and this appears to have been a major factor in his appointment as Gibson wanted an interesting group of people in the team: British Library Sound Archive (BLSA) C447/11/01-02: Gibson interviewed by Andrew Saint, March 1984
[22] PJMC GB 0237/PJM/ABT/G *A Charter for Architectural Assistants Employed in Public Offices* (AASTA, 1938); *Keystone,* March 1939, pp.3-5
[23] *Keystone,* July 1939, p.23
[24]Typically, technical staff would be on temporary contracts and subject to one month's notice. An anonymous architect who wrote about public employment in 1938 had been on the temporary staff for three years and had colleagues who had been '"temporary" men for eight years and more.': Beginnings III', *A&BN*, 21 October 1938, p.67

Another departure, which Manning felt would be 'startling to those accustomed to the atmosphere of most official offices', was Gibson's early decision to inform all the council departments that his office was not there just to design buildings, but 'to design anything, from furniture to signposts' and that 'he would welcome enquiries accordingly'. [25] Two departments had already responded and Manning saw the move as most encouraging for those who believed that design was not 'confined to the 'addition of "features" to stereotyped plans, but includes the surroundings and appurtenances as well as the buildings themselves'.[26]

Percy Johnson-Marshall mentioned this aspect of the office's work in *Rebuilding Cities*. Collaboration with other departments on items such as 'gardens, lamp standards, litter baskets, bus shelters, signs, railings etc' was seen as a 'great opportunity to influence the public taste in good design'. Small design problems were often presented to the department as competition *esquisses*, 'to stimulate keenness in design'. Sketches were prepared in spare-time and the winner was given the opportunity, where possible, to complete the project.[27]

The internal organisation of the office, as described by Manning, was a paradigm of the 'group system'. The architects were divided into four groups, each responsible for one or two large projects and additional small jobs if they were able to handle them. Each group dealt with all the paperwork relevant to their particular projects, could visit jobs whenever they deemed it necessary and were responsible for communicating with any other departments involved in a project. The group leader attended all appropriate committee meetings.

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[25] *Keystone,* July 1939, p.23
[26] Ibid.
[27] Percy Johnson-Marshall, *Rebuilding Cities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966), p.292

Importantly, in view of F.B.Maynard's suggestion that the Chief Architect's stamp cloaked responsible men's work 'in ungenerous and discouraging anonymity', recognition of responsibility was to be extended beyond the office with Gibson proposing to publish the name of the responsible assistant with any work which appeared in the press.[28] Study of press reports and journal articles shows that this promise was carried out.[29]

In his earlier examination of group working, Manning highlighted the design and technical deficiencies often inherent in offices run by a dominant principal. In Coventry the professional development of all staff was clearly a vital factor in the working of the department. Staff were encouraged to undertake research and allowed time off to attend events of professional interest. Within the department technical journals were available, including European publications. The fact that Manning felt the need to highlight this facility suggests that it was not a standard feature of official offices at that time. In turn the importance which Gibson placed on the availability of up-to-date technical information is demonstrated by the development of this library into a huge technical resource, accessed by other departments and members of other local authorities.[30]

The report did not examine Gibson's role as head of department per se, and it was perhaps too early in its development for Manning to ascertain whether the new City Architect was the 'administrative architect' he envisaged heading a 'group working' office. It is clear however, from interviews with former department members, that Gibson was the perfect overseer of such a working

[28] *A&BN,* 30 April 1937; *Daily Telegraph,* 24 March 1937; S*unday Times* comment, 25 April 1937.
[29]Gibson was always keen to acknowledge the work of others. When he took over the Crematorium project from Ernest Ford he decided that the chapel should perpetuate the names of the men whose skill was in the building; the initials of the workmen were carved on the column bases: *Municipal Review,* July 1943.
[30] Douglas Chalk interviewed by the author 23 June 2006

system and that he was in every respect 'co-operative rather than autocratic'.[31] Douglas Chalk, an architect who worked in the department from 1951-57, describes him as 'essentially an enabler of others', 'a kindly head-master figure – his presence felt but not seen'. [32] He would be well aware of what was going on in the office 'but never went from drawing board to drawing board'.[33]

Manning regarded Coventry's appointment of a young man to such a responsible post and the organisation of the department along the lines advocated in the AASTA charter, as 'two outstanding points of importance to all officially-employed architects (especially to AASTA members)' and 'a gratifying tribute to the work of those who compiled the charter'. The result was 'a live enthusiasm in the work and confidence in the chief which is conspicuously lacking in most official departments'.[34]

Perhaps the greatest tribute to the success of Gibson's organisational and managerial style was that it was able to encompass both the changing nature of the work load and the enormous growth of the department over the next sixteen years. The group working system fulfilled AASTA's confidence in it, but in 1947, after eight years of renown for Gibson's department, local authority offices generally had changed little, and AASTA still had to explain the workings of the group system.[35]

Another fundamental factor in the long term success of the department was its relationship with the leading personalities of Coventry's Labour Council, men such as Hodgkinson and Stringer. Manning had clearly found the Council's actions in the creation of the department fairly exceptional, but his report only hinted at the nature of this Council 'imbued with imagination'. In every way

[31] *Keystone,* March 1939, p.5
[32] Douglas Chalk. Letter to the author 1 December 2006 and interview 23 June 2006.
[33] Chalk. Letter to the author 7 March 2006.
[34] *Keystone,* July 1939, p.24
[35] *Keystone,* July/August 1947, p.141

Gibson and his team worked with, rather than for, their employers. Although the relationship was always 'strictly as representative to officer', there was a very different dynamic to the problematic Council/department relationships which Manning had outlined in 'Groups: a plea for up-to-date organisation'.[36]

Alderman George Hodgkinson wrote that the Labour Council 'believed in unleashing professional skills, and in "the creation of utopias and their exhaustive criticism"'.[37] This belief would become a central mantra as Coventry fought to achieve its aims after the war. As Hodgkinson also wrote, 'we were all in the work together, undertaking a social and spiritual task, and doing something for posterity'.[38]

4.3. AASTA: Political engagement and policy on reconstruction.

> 'Any progressive plan is […] political from its birth and it would save time to recognise it. We may be sure that fear of 'politics' is one reason why so few planners will tackle the problems of applying their schemes'.
>
> AASTA, 1941.[1]

A core tenet of the radical left wing was that the existing problems of the poor and working classes had to be dealt with in an immediate, practical way. Modern scientific advances had to be harnessed in the struggle for improvement. Architecture and planning were a critical part of the new future, but it was understood that problems could only be solved through engagement with their root causes and this necessitated systematic research and political

[36] George Hodgkinson, *Sent to Coventry,* (n.p.: Maxwell, 1970), p.173; *Keystone,* March 1939, p.3
[37] Hodgkinson (1970), p.171
[38] Ibid., p.173
[1] MRC MSS.78/BT/4/1/15(ii) What of the Future?: A statement of AASTA policy on plans for reconstruction (1941), p.2

engagement. Once the necessary information had been scientifically gathered and analysed, it could be built into the solid foundation needed for action to alleviate current problems.

A vital component of that foundation was the response of the general public, but they had to be taught to expect and demand better living conditions and a better built environment. The promotion of architecture, science and technology, in symbiotic union, as the weapon of choice against poverty, slums and ill health, is evidenced by the wealth of educational and informative literature published during the 1930s. As war approached, science and technology became essential parts of the propaganda movement, suggesting rational thought, certainty, clear cut cause and effect, cleanliness and objectivity, proven solutions to society's problems. Through pamphlets, advertisements, books, exhibitions and lectures, all sectors of society were steadily prepared for the fundamental improvements which modern architecture and planning could and would bring.

From the general accessibility of Penguin books such as J.M. Richards' *An Introduction to Modern Architecture*, and Thomas Sharp's *Town Planning*, both published in 1940, to the more expensive Studio publications such as *Colour Schemes and Modern Furnishing* by Derek Patmore, 1945, and Howard Robertson's *Reconstruction and the Home*, 1947, the public were being taught what to ask for, what to expect and how to interact with it.

From 1935 onwards there had been a noticeable change in AASTA's role and political stance, perhaps following the general shift in the intellectual left towards engagement with social issues, or perhaps as a direct response to the ATO's activism. Openly political articles began appearing in the pages of

Keystone, and a more vigorous line manifested itself in the work and publications of the Association.

This move was not universally supported. In 1937 Maxwell Fry cautioned against going too far in linking the politics of architectural employment with architecture. While he supported AASTA's campaign regarding 'terms of architectural employment' he was mindful that 'architecture as an intellectual excitement is but little affected by political considerations'.[2] The Editor of the *RIBAJ*, speaking at a 'lively' AASTA debate on 'Politics and Architecture', in 1938, said that while he believed the two subjects to be 'inextricably entangled' there were some who thought that architects should not take an active part in politics.[3] This certainly applied to Spence who wrote that 'it is very dangerous for an architect to align himself with any party in my experience'.[4]

The ATO had no such qualms and prepared a travelling exhibition and a 32-page pamphlet deploring the state of housing nationally and attacking the Government's housing record and policy.[5] The work showed that while the ATO was actively engaged in theoretical debate, it had no intention of simply providing an intellectual talking shop. The campaign gained widespread support and although critics attacked the political nature of the exhibition, the Executive Committee of the ATO believed that 'the ATO need not […] apologise for its vigorous excursion into the "political" field'.[6]

The shift from the theoretical utopian socialism of the early 1930s, towards active involvement in social issues, was cemented by the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. In 1937, as the situation in Europe worsened, the

[2]*Keystone,* April 1937, p.18
[3]*Keystone,* December 1938, p.16;
[4]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/9/1-245 Letter dated 14 May 1968
[5]Coe & Reading (1981), p.54-55, The exhibition was a response to the Governments policy of removing all council house building subsidies in order to stimulate the private house building market.
[6]Coe & Reading (1981), p.58

ATO began a campaign for civilian Air Raid Precautions, bringing together scientific research and design to oppose the government policy on shelter design and provision. Possibly as a response to the ATO's research commitment, AASTA decided to form working groups on technical and social problems in addition to professional issues.[7]

As the ATO's members joined AASTA the Association continued the ARP campaign with the same vigour and the same level of scientific input, producing a series of nine publications between 1938 and 1941. For AASTA the ARP work was an essential commitment to its social cause and a clear statement that, unlike the RIBA, the Association was concerned with current realities rather than future aspirations. One dissenting member, however, saw the ARP research as a diversion from the union's purpose: 'to obtain higher wages and better economic conditions for ourselves'.[8] He also saw little difference between the actions of the Association and the RIBA and considered both to be elitist and out of touch:

> When the day dawns fondly hang out your banners – Professional, Technical, Neutral, Expert, Non-Political – dive into your unbuilt ARP trenches, shelter in your drawing board civic centres, climb to your castles in the air; and prepare for decent and respectable burial and grateful appreciation of your services.
>
> Not until the AASTA shows itself more than a society of snobs, a company of talented intellectuals meeting in a vacuum, will it be able to come out unashamedly in defence of the rights of members; and it can only do this by coming out of the vacuum into the general working-class movement […][9]

The publication of the letter is perhaps indicative of the Association's confidence in its activities and the support it commanded. The lack of response in later journals also suggests that it was not viewed as a serious or widely held

[7] *Keystone,* February 1937, p.4
[8] *Keystone,* March 1939, p.23
[9] Ibid.

opinion. The reference to 'drawing board civic centres', however, may have caused the Association some discomfort.

With the war underway divisions had appeared between those who viewed planning for future reconstruction as an unnecessary, even dangerous, distraction and those who argued that plans had to be prepared to enable reconstruction work to start immediately the war ended.

AASTA believed that future reconstruction was dependent upon the creation of planning frameworks which, in turn, rested on fundamental restructuring of the country's legal, social and economic systems. Any planning which pre-empted these changes and failed to take account of the mechanisms by which it would be realised was utopian dreaming.

AASTA's 1941 policy statement on planning for reconstruction argued that such work diverted energies away from current issues: 'many technicians are turning away from the very real present to a vague future. They put their faith in and prepare plans for a future they cannot visualise completely'.[10] The Association believed that many planners had given no thought to the mechanics of putting their plan into action and they deemed such plans, critically, 'Utopian':

> The proposer […] will benefit no one else unless he can show how to change society. The application of a plan must be part of it; any progressive plan is therefore political from its birth and it saves time to recognise it. We may be sure that fear of "politics" is one reason why so few planners will tackle the problems of applying their schemes.[11]

AASTA was clear that the ability to plan the future would be governed by the ability to plan the present, 'the acid test for the true planner is in the present […] are we working *now* to get rid of the social and economic ties that hamper

[10]MRC. MSS.78/BT/4/1/15(ii) '*What of the future? A statement of AASTA policy on plans for reconstruction*' (n.p: AASTA, 1941), p.1
[11]Ibid., p.2

us? If we are not we deserve to be or probably shall be nothing but paid hacks for the rest of our lives'. They were also clear that architects had to educate the public 'so that the people's demands can become more precise and lead to action'. [12] Action, however, depended on fundamental changes in the building industry:

> We must realise that the future can be ours, but it will not be an easy inheritance. […] It is our task as progressive men and women to give a technical lead and a stimulus to all who would sweep aside the forces of obstruction. The building industry must be reorganised for social need and not for profit. Distribution of materials must be freed from the restriction of big business monopoly […]'[13]

While AASTA viewed reconstruction planning as a distraction, the Government saw it as necessary for morale. In a speech in April 1941 Lord Reith spoke about attitudes towards planning for the future:

> Do not let anyone think that what I or anybody else may be doing about the machinery for planning detracts from the war effort […] the idea of a planned and ordered reconstruction is surely an incentive to and an encouragement of the war effort.[14]

This was a view shared by architect, town planner and Honorary AASTA member, Professor Patrick Abercrombie.[15] In a letter to *Keystone* in February 1941, he launched a caustic attack on AASTA policy and its politics:

> I greet you as an apostle of Safety First and Escape Planning. Let no one, you say, be considered fit for rebuilding Britain unless he has built an air raid shelter – excellent conclusion! Let no planning be allowed or thought of until we have resolved the theses of Feuerbach, composed the quarrels of Marxists, designed the ideal Commonwealth and put it into smooth-running operation! Moreover, nothing must be done, even politically, in a hostile environment; spontaneous conversion to the state of the millennium must be prayed for and achieved first.
>
> How helpful! The political planner's advice! The technician who is feeble in his technique is so often powerful in his politics: he sees himself as a Commissar, smoking innumerable cigarettes, directing a hoard of

[12]MRC. MSS.78/BT/4/1/15(ii) '*What of the future? A statement of AASTA policy on plans for reconstruction*' (n.p: AASTA, 1941), p.3
[13]Ibid., p.4
[14]MRC. MSS.78/BT/5/4/5 *Architectural Design and Construction* (May 1941), p.105
[15]*Keystone,* February 1939, p.23

> industrious slave technicians what to do, secure that if anything goes wrong, the industrious technician can be shot for sabotage, while he issues another manifesto.
>
> But it is good to see that your feeble advice is already being ignored: men and women are at work studying the possibilities of rebuilding London, Coventry and other places; even the machinery for national planning is being considered, and not only in Government circles. But it is sad to see the AASTA flitting about the political trees of cloud-cuckoo-land and preaching unpreparedness.[16]

Even if intended as slightly tongue-in-cheek, it was a stinging rebuke and drew a response from Manning which shows the ambivalent nature of AASTA's stance on reconstruction and illuminates the differences of opinion which existed even amongst active members of the Association.

Coventry's plans had caused tensions within the Association, but this was not alluded to in Manning's response to Abercrombie. Refuting the allegations of 'preaching unpreparedness', Manning pointed out that the Coventry plans, had been prepared by 'an office which is largely staffed by AASTA members (including its chief) and is organised to a great extent on the lines advocated by the AASTA […] Of course we support these schemes'.[17]

Unequivocal support, however, was problematic. Coventry had produced and publicised their plan under the AASTA banner, an act which seemed to contradict the Association's policy on reconstruction, but the plan was based on the very real needs of Coventry's citizens, and both architects and employer were committed to carrying it out. The Association had to find a middle ground which did not undermine Coventry's work, thereby highlighting disunity, but which maintained a strong stance on policy while leaving open the opportunity for the Association to claim a part in the work, should the scheme succeed.

Manning's closing paragraph therefore contained a caveat which clearly separated the Association's national policy from the intentions of Coventry's

[16]Ibid.
[17]*Keystone,* April 1941, p.5

Branch members. Support was given to the planning because some good might possibly come from it, but also, paradoxically, because it was expected to fail:

> Of course we support these schemes, partly because bits of them may be carried out under our present economic system, which will be a concrete gain, partly because we know that failure to carry them out (remember 'Homes for Heroes') will show up more and more clearly the reasons for that failure and will thus bring nearer the achievement of conditions under which they **will** be carried out.[18]

This view was understandable and AASTA's stance was partly vindicated after the war, when many plans for reconstruction foundered on economic, material and political constraints.[19] In Coventry, although much of the plan was carried out, it was realised only after a long and bitter struggle against central government and against some of the city's own officials. Without the presence of figures such as Hodgkinson and Gibson, and the city's unique symbolic role in the fight against fascism, it is quite possible that the plans would have crumbled under government opposition, financial, labour and material restrictions.[20]

[18] *Keystone,* April 1941, p.5

[19] Junichi Hasegawa examines the different constraints which impacted on the final realisation of three reconstruction plans in, 'The Replanning of the Blitzed City Centre in Britain: A comparative study of Bristol, Coventry and Southampton, 1941-1950', PhD thesis (University of Warwick, 1989)

[20] Hasegawa (1989) examines the long battle between the city council, central government and forces within the Council itself to prevent Coventry going ahead with its plans.

4.4. ‘A Propaganda Exhibition for a Civic Survey, and Town Plan for Coventry’:

The ‘Coventry of Tomorrow’ Exhibition, May 1940.

> Something is wrong with our City.
> This is as plain as a pike staff.
>
> Anon., 1940.[1]

> As we slacken or are complacent in wartime,
> so shall we leave it to the other man, and
> rebuild the civilisation of suburban morons.
> What we do today decides tomorrow.
>
> David Percival, 1943.[2]

In 1940 the Coventry Branch of AASTA organised the ‘Coventry of Tomorrow’ exhibition. In comparison with the 1938 MARS Group exhibition at Burlington House, it was very much ‘paste-pot and string’ rather than slick professionalism, but the zeal and enthusiasm which went into its preparation, and its aims and message, made it an exemplar of the educational propaganda offensive. It took its message directly to Coventry’s citizens, presenting them not with a generalised future, but with *their* future and, more importantly, a future which their Council fully intended to create.

Coventry Labour Party’s election victory, in November 1937, had ended a century of political control by the city’s ‘shopocracy’ of small retailers and professionals. The city’s predominantly working class population had always lacked political representation and the city’s major industrialists were content with the political status quo.

The new Labour Council inherited immense problems. Industrial growth in the city had led to massive inward migration of workers and a population of nearly 70,000 in 1901, had grown to over 204,000 in 1937.[3] Despite this

[1] PJMC. GB0237/PJM/ABT/E 1 of 3 *Coventry Tomorrow*
[2] MRC. MSS.78/BT/1/3/11 17th AGM 4/12/43. David Percival, Presidential Address.
[3]Kenneth Richardson, *Twentieth Century Coventry,* (Coventry: City of Coventry, 1972), p.64

expansion there had been few corresponding changes in Coventry's infra-structure or civic amenities. Culturally it was impoverished, with no theatre, art gallery or central library, the Council House and the law courts were grossly inadequate and facilities such public swimming pools did not exist. The cramped and over-crowded core of the city was still largely medieval in plan and structure, the city had a massive housing shortage and housing conditions were appalling.

When Gibson took up his post he had no control over housing and planning remained firmly within the remit of the City Engineer. The department's first building for the Council was a block of public conveniences at Barras Heath; a park shelter; a 'super affair, spacious, totally enclosed with glass and -heated', was never built.[4] Next reports noted that the City Architect had been asked to get on with plans for a new art school and, at the end of February, the PAC requested a report from Gibson on plans for a new civic centre.[5]

The creation of a civic area had been an ongoing issue for several years. In 1936, private Coventry architects Hellberg, Redgrave and Beney had presented their proposals, Alderman Payne had devised a scheme for the city centre in 1937 and City Engineer, Ernest Ford, had produced several plans, one in December 1938, just prior to the Architect's Department opening.[6] Local papers had debated the various ideas and Coventry's citizens were therefore well attuned to the idea and keen to see progress made.

Ford's scheme involved widening certain roads, but keeping the existing street plan basically unchanged. He grouped the civic buildings around the cathedral on a pronounced north-south axis.[7]

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[4]*MDT,* 27 January 1939.
[5]*MDT,* 4 February 1939; *MDT,* 25 February 1939.
[6]*MDT,* 14 May 1936; *MDT,* 26 January 1937; 'Plan for the new Civic Centre', Mr Ford. December 1938, copy held by CCC City Development Directorate.
[7]Ernest Ford Civic Centre Plan, 1938.

In February 1939, 'after two years intensive study and work on the problem', the City Guild put forward their ideas.[8] They also suggested that the civic centre be built around the Cathedral Close, but they placed a civic square to the east of St Michael's and enclosed this to the north and east with the Town Hall, law courts and police station. The Guild said that they had worked for 'a practical solution without being unduly extravagant', but would be pleased if the Council were to adopt 'a more imaginative scheme than that […] proposed.'[9] Out of all the plans which had been produced the City Guild's were, according to Percy Johnson-Marshall, 'the only proposals worth considering'.[10]

Despite all the discussion no co-ordinated plan existed for the city centre and new developments were allowed on a piecemeal basis which perpetuated and accentuated the city's problems. Almost from his first day as City architect, Gibson had been particularly irritated by proposals for the City's new art gallery, being funded by industrialist Sir Alfred Herbert. Despite Gibson's vehement objection to the design, positioning and materials of this 'domed mauselium (sic) in white Portland Stone', he had been unable to prevent work from proceeding.[11]

Clearly a planning framework needed to be put in place which would provide an overall structure for future development and prevent piecemeal infill from obstructing any long term rationalisation of the city centre. Gibson began with plans for the civic centre and put Percy Johnson-Marshall in charge of a team of four (all of them AASTA members) to work on a 'correlated scheme for all the Civic Buildings considered necessary' and a display model. [12]

[8]*MDT,* 20 February 1939.
[9]Ibid.
[10]Johnson-Marshall (1966), p.292
[11]CHC. PA623 Gibson personal notes February 1972. Construction of the gallery was halted by the war and the building never progressed beyond the basement. In 1972 Gibson still felt strongly enough about the issue to write 'I shall be more happy when the old foundations, and the present basement is removed'.
[12]Johnson-Marshall (1966), p.293

It was this project which would become the central feature of the department's propaganda campaign to 'make the people of Coventry Planning and Design conscious'.[13] It would also instigate the fairly lengthy process of removing planning control from the City Engineer.

The process of educating the public appears to have started fairly early in the department's existence with an art exhibition in 1939, photographs of which still exist.[14] A wide variety of arts and crafts were on display, but the exhibition's purpose was clearly pedagogic as a poster on the introductory panel read:

> ART IS INTEGRATING
>
> ARCHITECTURE PAINTING
> SCULPTURE AND LIVING
>
> THE WELL MAKING OF
> THAT WHICH NEEDS MAKING
>
> EATING DRESSING HOUSING
> ENGINEERING
>
> FIRST IN A SERIES OF EXHIBITIONS
> OF THE WORKS OF THOSE
> MOVING TOWARDS THIS
> SYNTHESIS [15]

Photographs show that there was a clear sense of passage through the exhibits, with the public moving past careful groupings of materials, styles and textures. Without an obvious lesson being taught, visitors were hopefully imbibing the implicit message that design was an intrinsic and vital part of everything that was important to the way they lived their lives.

The message only became overt in a small 'Design for Living Section', where examples of modern architecture were presented alongside pictures of Coventry's medieval gateways. A panel of text was headed 'The first thing is to

[13] Ibid.
[14] PJMC. GB0237/PJM/ABT/E 1 of 3 'Coventry Exhibitions'
[15] PJMC. GB0237/PJM/ABT/E 1 of 3 'Coventry Exhibitions' Photo 26/02

make a plan' and among a list of points of good practice were references to 'schools planned in relation to housing' and 'a civic centre'. The text ended:

> 'This is only a suggestion.
> IT SHOULD BE A REALITY FOR EVERY CITY AND TOWN'.[16]

The exhibition was clearly an early foray into engagement with Coventry's public, prior to the wider publicity for the civic centre plan and the commencement of talks and lectures. The opening panel announced it as the 'first in a series of exhibitions', and environmental design was allotted a very small space within the display, planning was mentioned but not the Coventry Plan. The exhibition as a whole had little of the didactic quality seen in later exhibitions and it seems likely that the organisers understood the need to connect initially with the public through a medium with which they were probably familiar – arts and crafts – and work from that basis towards the wider implications of design.

As work on the correlated scheme progressed, publicity was used to maintain public interest in the planning process. Percy Johnson-Marshall recalled that members of the Council were given copies of Lewis Mumford's *The Culture of Cities* to read: 'we thought it so important we passed it on'.[17] A lecture, which Gibson gave at the RIBA in 1947, summed up his approach to public relations:

> On the public relations side, it is very important in an office like ours to keep the Council and citizens informed and interested in what is going on, and I think one has got to maintain propaganda. You cannot just leave it: you have got to keep on all the time. For instance we give a lot of lectures: we always try to get a member of the Council to take the chair at these lectures, so that they will understand what is being said. Our architects go and give lectures to the schools so that we shall be building up in the future a useful population who understand these

[16] PJMC. GB0237/PJM/ABT/E 1 of 3 'Coventry Exhibitions' Photos 26/04 and 05
[17] Johnson-Marshall (1966), p.295

> things. […] Another important thing is that you should know the Press in your city. [18]

In formulating the new plan, Johnson-Marshall and his team wanted, as far as possible, 'to keep the main uses approximately in the positions which they had always occupied, for in nearly every city there is a natural order of which things respond somehow to the way people live.'[19] Pivotal to the scheme, as with those of the City Engineer and the City Guild, was the ecclesiastical heart of the city. Centred on the Cathedral and Holy Trinity Church, new civic buildings would be gathered 'around a dignified and spacious Close'.[20] To emphasise the vertical accents, and focal role of the Churches, the new buildings were to be kept relatively low. Unity between the old and the new would be achieved through the use of facing materials harmonious to the red sandstone of the medieval buildings.[21]

The first general meeting of AASTA's Coventry Branch, which comprised most of the Architect's Department, was held in November 1939. Secretary Percy Johnson-Marshall reported that activities would continue in spite of the war.[22] Among the items discussed was the possibility of arranging debates with the Coventry Society of Architects, and the decision was taken to support the Society 'in all matters except where their interests were in conflict with AASTA'.[23]

In January 1940, with planning of the civic centre scheme virtually complete, the decision was taken 'to hold a Propaganda Exhibition as a prelude to commencing a civic survey of Coventry'.[24] It was decided that financial

[18]'Architects to Public Authorities', *RIBAJ*, June 1947, p.405
[19]Johnson-Marshall (1966), p.295
[20]Ibid., p.293
[21]Ibid.
[22]*Keystone,* November 1940, p.11
[23]*Keystone,* November 1939, p.3
[24]PJMC. GB0237/PJM/ABT/E 3 of 3. Minutes 18 January 1940

assistance should be sought from AASTA, but this was to prove problematic for the Association.[25]

The purpose of the exhibition was to educate the public and gather support for a survey of Coventry, which, in turn, would provide information about the immediate needs of the city on which further plans could then be based. This was very much in line with AASTA's ethos, but the Association disapproved of planning for 'a vague future' which could not be realised within existing political, financial and planning frameworks.[26] The plans and models, enthusiastically being produced by their Coventry members, conflicted with that stance. If AASTA offered unreserved support, it would call into question the Association's credibility, but refusal to assist would call into question their loyalty to their members. In the end they chose a rather half-hearted stance: giving the money, but asking that it not be spent, and supporting the exhibition, but only insofar as the failure of its plans for the future would prove that AASTA policy had been correct.[27] It is perhaps significant that flyers for the exhibition acknowledged only the support of the City Guild, the RIBA, the Housing Centre, the MARS Group and NALGO.[28]

Keystone reported in February 1940 that the Coventry Branch were to hold 'an exhibition of good contemporary designs as a prelude to commencing a civic survey of Coventry'. Any mention of the civic centre plan was avoided.[29]

The following month the Branch set up seven committees to deal with housing, communications, health, industry, education, publicity and 'Coventry etc'. Wives had now been co-opted to the exhibition group, but apart from Mrs Johnson-Marshall it is not known whether any of these were qualified

[25]PJMC. GB0237/PJM/ABT/E 3 of 3. Letter 22 February 1940
[26]MRC. MSS.78/BT/4/1/15(ii) p.1
[27]*Keystone,* April 1941, p.5
[28]PJMC. GB0237/PJM/ABT/E 1 of 3 'Coventry of Tomorrow' flyer
[29]*Keystone,* February 1940, p.2

architects.[30] The Minutes record that the MARS Group were to be contacted with regard to models of 'Town of Tomorrow (AA)', 'Ocean Street Housing Scheme', and 'Impington School (Fry)'.[31]

The list of models indicates the group's high aspirations for the exhibition and for the future course of Coventry's planning and architecture. They had no intention of simply presenting examples of good design to the public. Instead they wanted the public to be aware that, beyond the role of the architect as a designer of individual buildings, the profession had a role in the wider environment and that new and innovative, modern approaches to planning for communities were ready to provide a bright and more comfortable future.

'Town of Tomorrow (AA)', which was borrowed for the exhibition, was the 'Tomorrow Town' project prepared by students of the AA between 1937 and 1938, under the direction of E.A.A.Rowse. The scheme drew on the new planning concept of 'neighbourhood units' and it is entirely possible that Gibson was already considering the part which neighbourhood units would play in Coventry's housing plans. The model would allow citizens and Council members to see the concept which would eventually develop into the country's first neighbourhood unit at Tile Hill. 'Tomorrow Town' also presented Coventry's citizens with the antithesis of the cramped, overcrowded, polluted city in which they lived, with trade, housing and factories cheek by jowl. It introduced them to planning as a solution to the rootlessness of a largely migrant city, and as a means of creating, nurturing and sustaining communities. It also offered the promise of a cleaner, healthier lifestyle through the separation of everyday living from the noise and pollution of heavy industry, something which must have struck a deep chord in this manufacturing city.

[30]PJMC GB 0237/PJM/ABT/E 3 of 3. Minutes of meeting 18 March 1940
[31]PJMC. GB0237/PJM/ABT/E 3 of 3. Minutes 11 March 1940.

The ‘Ocean Street Housing Scheme’ models likewise appeared in the exhibition. The scheme, again by students of the AA, was based on the Ocean Street area of Stepney which was due to be cleared and redeveloped by the LCC. The scheme’s importance lay in the pioneering use of residents’ views to formulate the design, research which had revealed that their housing preferences did not match the LCC proposals for flats. The resulting scheme brought the two differing lines of thought together in a low-rise estate with ‘duplex units of two-storey flats’.[32]

The concepts introduced by the Ocean Street Scheme were, again, very pertinent to Coventry and to Gibson’s desire to work with the people of the city to engender pride, involvement and a sense of belonging. The ‘Coventry of Tomorrow’ exhibition was intended to precede a ‘social, statistical and topographical’ survey of the City, and ‘Ocean Street’ showed what could result when facts rather than assumptions formed the basis of planning.[33]

For Coventry’s population, with few local roots and little civic allegiance, the project showed that people’s views mattered and that they could be involved in the development of their neighbourhoods. Planning should not be something which happened *to* people, but something in which they were involved.

Just as Coventry eventually led the way in developing the ‘Tomorrow Town’ concept of neighbourhood units, it also went on to develop the ‘Ocean Street’ concept of public participation, commissioning in 1949 one of the first major sociological surveys of its kind, to ascertain how the residents of the district of Canley felt about their houses and their environment.[34]

[32]Ibid., p.143
[33]PJMC. GB0237/PJM/ABT/E 1 of 3 ‘Coventry Tomorrow’ p.3
[34]Tiratsoo (1990), p.57

Gropius and Fry's Impington School does not appear to have been shown in the exhibition, but again the building represented the approach Gibson wished to pursue. It encapsulated the belief that providing centres which brought together education and community activities would 'create out of discrete elements an organic whole […] greater than the mere sum of its parts. […] It would be a true social synthesis'.[35]

Again the emphasis was on fostering community spirit, but the design also encapsulated a belief in the transformative power of architecture. Henry Morris, Cambridgeshire's Director of Education and the driving force behind the village college movement, believed that the provision of educational buildings would be 'one of the chiefest ways in which the art of architecture can influence the body politic'.[36] Good design was vital to this influence, 'buildings that are well-designed and equipped and beautifully decorated will exercise their potent, but unspoken influence on those who use them from day to day. This is true education.'[37]

With the aims and structure of the exhibition agreed, publicity was also discussed. [38] Public lectures on planning and design were to play a vital role during the period of the exhibition and the list of suggested lecturers included: Professor Abercrombie, Wesley Dougill, Eric Gill and Elizabeth Denby.[39] Few of the speakers initially approached were available and Johnson-Marshall wrote to J H Forshaw to ask whether he would speak on 'Planning for Industry'. He

[35]Henry Morris, *The Village College: Being a Memorandum on the Provision of Educational and Social Facilities for the Countryside, with Special Reference to Cambridgeshire* Section XV. (1st edn.) (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1925).
[36]Ibid., Section XIV
[37]Jeffs. *Henry Morris. Village colleges, community education and the ideal order* (Educational Heretics Press, 1999) p.58
[38]PJMC. GB0237/PJM/ABT/E 3 of 3. Minutes 18/3/40
[39]PJMC. GB0237/PJM/ABT/E 3 of 3. Minutes 8/4/40

apologised for his presumption, but wrote 'I feel that now is the time to convince people of the necessity of planning now that civil building has almost ceased'.[40]

Not everyone was convinced, however, and a letter to the *Midland Daily Telegraph* complained about the costs of the Architect's Department and the fact that 'local and able' architects, having been deprived of work, were having to pay through their rates to keep the Architect's Department 'fed […] whether it is fully employed or not.'[41]

The local press was more enthusiastic and the main article in the *Coventry Herald* on the 4th May 1940 featured the exhibition under the headline 'Fifty-Year Plan For City's New Civic Centre, Dignified buildings set amid parks and open spaces; Architect's efforts to harmonise with surroundings; Scale model of glue, paint and cardboard'.[42] The plans had been explained to the paper by 'Mr P J Marshall, lean, enthusiastic young senior assistant to the City Architect' who emphasised the importance of the public's interest in a complete civic survey, and the beauty of the proposed new buildings.

'Coventry of Tomorrow' was opened on the 6th May by Dennis Morris, of the Ministry of Information. A publicity poster promised that visitors would see 'the traffic problem solved – the city made beautiful'.[43] People were invited to:

> Come and see what can be achieved in building and town planning and thus help to create a well-informed outlook on improving Coventry to the best advantage […] the exhibition will demonstrate the proper planning for Health, Housing, Education, Transport and Industry.[44]

A pamphlet, *Coventry of Tomorrow: Towards a beautiful City,* explained the reasons for the exhibition, its language full of vivid imagery.[45] The City was

[40]PJMC. GB0237/PJM/ABT/E 3 of 3. Letter to Forshaw 23/4/40
[41] CHC Scrapbook 'Architect's Department News Cuttings', *MDT*, 1 April 1940.
[42]PJMC. GB0237/PJM/CCC/A/1/3 Press cuttings
[43]PJMC. GB0237/PJM/ABT/E 1 of 3 Poster
[44]PJMC. GB0237/PJM/ABT/E 1 of 3 'Coventry of Tomorrow' flyer
[45]PJMC. GB0237/PJM/ABT/E 1 of 3 'Coventry Tomorrow' p.1. Percy Johnson-Marshall was almost certainly the author of the pamphlet.

'ill and not functioning correctly'; it was 'badly planned and ill made', and its many problems were all presided over by the 'ugly and depressing pompous foolery of its architecture'. The exhibition's aim was to present a better alternative and show how it could be achieved, but also to impress upon the public the need to demand that better future.

The un-named writer was careful throughout the text not to divide the expert from the non-expert. 'We' is predominantly used in a collective sense, Coventry is 'our City' never 'your City' and, while a better future is waiting, the onus is on a collective demand for change, the citizens 'must demand its realisation'; 'we must know what we want', 'we must agitate till we get this thing', 'we must be about and doing'.[46]

The benefits which Science would bring were clearly stated,

> The technical resources and inventions of Science are waiting to be used, if we want it, to create this City; created with a new light and graceful architecture; an architecture of joy and beauty, which once imagined will sweep away the solemn ugliness of our City in a gale of healthy laughter.'[47]

There was also a clear message to AASTA in opposition to their policy on planning for reconstruction. The writer began by asking what could be done:

> We are at War and everything must be subordinated to its prosecution. How can we build when our energies are so diverted? How can we build when so much is to be destroyed? Can we afford to cease to work for a creative end, even though we are at War?[48]

The AASTA policy on the last question was that such 'work for a creative end' had to stop, to concentrate on present problems and on changing the basic social and legislative frameworks in which planning took place. The writer's view was very different: creative work had to continue, 'if we do not the open gate of defeatism lies ahead, and behind it the declining path of

[46]PJMC. GB0237/PJM/ABT/E 1 of 3 'Coventry Tomorrow', p.1
[47]Ibid.
[48]Ibid., p.3

civilisation – decadence'. Was it possible, the writer wondered, to be decadent 'whilst we have one single creative idea in our heads?' The answer was yes, if they 'did not strive to realise this idea'. Taking the course which AASTA proposed would mean that 'we are indeed decadent, defeated'.[49]

The exhibition proved very successful; the original five day run was extended and 5,000 people visited St Mary's Hall.[50] The lectures were well attended, every school child in the city had an opportunity to visit the exhibition and many visitors came from outside Coventry; London, Portsmouth, Doncaster, even Kenya and North America are among addresses listed in the visitors' book.[51] Some comments on the exhibition expressed concerns about the costs and practicality of the proposals, but most were very positive: 'A spark of sanity in a depraved world most certainly.'; 'A Coventry such as you suggest would be worth living in'; 'If Coventry is planned in this way in the future Coventry people should be very proud'; 'Worth fighting for'; 'If only!!!!!!'[52]

While the exhibition provided a welcome opportunity for Gibson and his team to present their ideas and educate the public about the role of the architect and planner, the daily focus of the department remained air-raid shelter provision, decontamination stations and housing, responsibility for which had passed to Gibson following the retirement of the director of housing at the end of March 1940.[53] In light of the city's acute housing shortage and an anticipated influx of 36,000 munitions workers, the Ministry of Health had given special permission for construction to resume on properties halted by the start of the war, as well as granting licences for additional building to start.[54]

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[49]Ibid.
[50]Tiratsoo (1990), p.9
[51]PJMC GB 0237/PJM/ABT/E 2 of 3. Exhibition Comments book, May 1940.
[52]Ibid.
[53]CHC HC, 15 February 1940
[54]CHC PAC, 5 January 1940; CHC HC, 5 December 1939 and 27 February 1940; *MDT,* 21 March 1940; *MDT,* 23 March 1940; CHC PAC, 19 March 1940.

Progress was hampered, however, by labour and material shortages and Gibson began to examine new materials and building systems which might overcome the problems.[55]

As Gibson and his team dealt with an increasingly heavy workload, Coventry Society of Architects appealed to the PAC for some of the Corporation's work to be delegated to the private sector. They argued that it would relieve the pressure on the City Architect and would preserve 'the competitive element and contribute towards individuality and diversity of design'.[56] The request was refused, but the Committee said that as vacancies arose applications from private architects would be considered. Similar requests from the Coventry and District House Builders Association and the Electrical Contractors' Association were also refused.[57]

On the 14th November 1940, the tenor of the planning debate was changed entirely as the city suffered sustained enemy bombing. Two thirds of the city's rateable properties were damaged, including 4,185 dwellings rendered uninhabitable, over 4000 school places were lost and the commercial centre of the city all but disappeared.[58] On the 4th December 1940, Gibson presented a paper on the 'Planning Post-War Reconstruction' at the Royal Society of Arts.[59] The talk, prepared prior to the bombing of Coventry, now had a deeper resonance as Gibson told his audience there was the possibility that 'like a forest fire the present evil might bring forth greater riches and beauty.'[60]

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[55]The development of Coventry as a centre for experimental building work is discussed in Sarah Shaw, 'Experimentation and Innovation in Coventry 1938-1955', MA Dissertation (University of Keele, 1993)
[56]CHC PAC, 18 July 1940
[57]CHC HC, 26 August 1940
[58]CHC Acc.483 Reports of the Coventry Reconstruction Coordinating Committee 3 December 1940 and 1 May 1941; Tiratsoo (1990), p.11; G C Firth, *75 Years of Service to Education* (Coventry: CCC, 1977), p.81
[59]Donald Gibson, 'Planning Post-War Reconstruction', *Municipal Journal & Local Government Administrator,* 13 December 1940, pp.1583-4
[60]Ibid., p.1584

He already had a civic centre plan prepared and now 'in one night the site is largely cleared for this regeneration. It rests but with the fortunes of war and the desire of a great people to see it accomplished.'[61]

4.5. City and Cathedral: Planning and reconstruction.

> To make plans and project designs brings with it many good sensations: and whoever had the strength to be nothing but a forger of plans his whole life long would be a very happy man: but he would occasionally have to take a rest from this activity by carrying out a plan – and then comes the vexation and the sobering up.
>
> Nietzsche.[1]

The bombing of Coventry - 'the murder of a provincial town' - rapidly acquired a very different emotional weight to that of other cities.[2] Unprecedented press coverage turned the city and its shattered Cathedral into public property and powerful propaganda. The city's plans for reconstruction were used to help focus public attention on the future, but they also became the focus of battles between local and national government, socialist principles and commerce. The Cathedral, in its turn, formed a focus for liturgical and architectural debate and disagreement, and both city and Cathedral were attacked by traditionalists and modernists alike.

The post-1940 planning and rebuilding of the city centre has received considerable critical attention notably Lancaster and Mason (1986), Hasegawa (1989), Tiratsoo (1990), Bullock (2002) and Hubbard, Faire and Lilley (2002 & 2003). The processes, triumphs and tribulations of the cathedral project have been detailed by Campbell (1996), and people closely involved in both projects

[61] Ibid.
[1] Quoted in Mark Long, *The Post War Planning Office: Coventry's Department of Architecture and Planning 1957-1966*, PhD thesis (Liverpool University, 1986)
[2] Hodgkinson (1970), p.167

have given their accounts including Johnson-Marshall (1966), Hodgkinson (1970) and Spence (1962). Nevertheless this period of Gibson and Spence's careers cannot be passed over here and the following section provides a necessarily shortened narrative of the period from the blitz until Gibson's departure from Coventry in 1955, a period during which Spence and Gibson's careers came together briefly in the city. It then moves on, somewhat ahead of the body of the narrative, to look in broad terms at the organisation of Spence's offices and how this changed in the period prior to the consecration of the Cathedral in 1962.

Looking back on the bombing of Coventry Gibson described how he and his staff, working as fire watchers 'used to go up and see which buildings would be burnt to see how it would speed up our planning. […] We knew which were the key buildings to get down'.[3] The story appears callous, but encapsulates the enthusiasm and sometimes blinkered idealism of the young architects, utterly convinced of their role and the benefits which they could bring to the city. Although Gibson spoke of speeding up 'our planning', he had no jurisdiction over planning decisions at that time; the City Engineer, Ernest Ford, had retained the position of Chief Planning Officer on Gibson's appointment.

While Gibson had the luxury of an architectural department which was independent from the City Engineer, having to defer to him in planning matters severely limited the control which Gibson believed he should have over the future development of the city. In August 1940 he set out his views on the role of the architect and planner in an article for Coventry Corporation publication *Camera Principis*.[4] He believed that the architect must take every advantage of

[3] BLSA C447/11/01-02: Gibson interviewed by Andrew Saint, March 1984.
[4] Donald Gibson, 'Post-War Civil Development', *Camera Principis* (August 1940), pp.2-3

discoveries which enabled ‘the problem of living to be solved with greater efficiency’ and must ‘learn to create beauty with the new materials’.[5] More significantly, he wrote that the town planner must be ‘a man of exceptional imagination and aesthetic sensibility’, and should be ‘the chief authority in all matters relating to the design, structure and appearance of the city’.[6] He should have ‘authority […] over all the other officers in any local authority.’[7]

For many reasons the relationship between Ford and Gibson had been strained since the latter’s appointment, and this thinly disguised statement of intent from Gibson cannot have helped. There were long standing frictions between the civil engineering and architectural professions, which meant that surrendering many of his core responsibilities to Gibson must have been very difficult for Ford. Gibson made clear his view that the architect was the only professional qualified to make planning and architectural judgements. They both had very different outlooks on architecture and planning and Ford’s pragmatic, cost aware approach clashed with Gibson’s youthful, 'sometimes […] alarmingly messianic’, idealism.[8] Perhaps the most important factor in their poor relationship was the mutual respect and like-mindedness between Gibson and Hodgkinson, which meant that Gibson’s views carried considerable weight within the controlling group of the Labour Council.[9]

The actions of the PAC in turning to Gibson for a report on the Civic Centre plans, rather than the Chief Planning Officer, cannot have helped matters. Nor can the development of the report into a plan, model, lectures to

[5] Ibid. p.3
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Gibson Obituary, *Daily Telegraph*, 27 January 1991.
[9] The relationship between the two men never improved. In the Gibson Collection a photograph of Princess Elizabeth, with Gibson and officials, at the opening of Broadgate, 1948, was labelled by Gibson – ‘City Engineer Ernest Ford, not my friend.....Alderman Hodgkinson Chairman of Planning (my friend)’

schools and a highly successful exhibition.[10] No concerns appear to have been voiced about Gibson encroaching on Ford's planning remit and Ford can have been left in no doubt that Gibson was determined to exercise planning control, and that the PAC would not rein in his efforts in this direction.

In the aftermath of the blitz, damage surveys, emergency repairs, shelters and feeding stations became the focus of Gibson's team. In December 1940 the newly formed City Redevelopment Committee asked Gibson and Ford to collaborate on a redevelopment plan for the city centre.[11] Gibson's radical approach and Ford's wish to restore normality to the city centre as quickly as possible could not be reconciled and separate schemes were prepared; once again, Gibson was encouraged to extend his remit to planning.

Early in January 1941 Lord Reith's advice to Coventry to 'plan boldly and comprehensively' and 'not at this stage worry about finance or local boundaries' gave added impetus to Gibson's, and Hodgkinson's, ideas for the city.[12] The following month the two reconstruction schemes were presented to the Redevelopment Committee. In his memoirs Hodgkinson refers to Ford's proposals (see Figure 32), rather deprecatingly, as 'minor improvements to the street lines, splaying corners, and titivating here and there, a kind of "wash and brush up".'[13] Gibson's report on the scheme was equally damning:

> It appears to me that the plan […] consists in the main of street improvements, on existing lines, and although such a plan might in some cases avoid troubles with ownership, it would not in my opinion provide such opportunities for architectural effects and for the amenities which our civilisation has given us the right to expect.[14]

His annotations on a copy of Ford's plan included references to 'unsatisfactory architectural effect'; 'bad streets to remain'; 'badly shaped sites';

[10] Johnson-Marshall (1966), p.292
[11] Richardson (1972), p.285
[12] 'Vision out of the flames, '*CET,* 13 January 1972; City Redevelopment Committee (CRC) Minutes 15 January 1941, delegation visited Reith on 15 January 1941.
[13] Hodgkinson (1970), p.170
[14] Gibson Coll., Extract from Gibson's report quoted in 'The Gibson Plan, Article No.4', p.3

'bad shape, dangerous positions for traffic'; 'Civic buildings blocked by shops' and 'bad traffic junctions'.[15]

Hodgkinson believed that Gibson's plan, 'with the freshness and thrustfulness of youth on his side, took a much more bold, devastating and revolutionary view of the inviting opportunities.'[16] Gibson was not a sentimentalist and his scheme all but obliterated the city's medieval street pattern (see Figure 33). A large pedestrian precinct replaced the major shopping streets, its main axis aligned on the spire of St Michaels, areas for commerce and entertainment were zoned to the west of the cathedral, with civic, legal and cultural areas to the east, and the land around the churches formed a broad green linking the cathedral and city centre.[17]

The Council's vote on the schemes was forty-six to six in favour of Gibson's proposals.[18] As a result Gibson was appointed Joint Planning Officer, a situation which Ford must have found barely tenable. After seventeen years as City Engineer it had taken just two years to reduce his responsibilities to little more than road planning and construction.

The Council decided to submit Gibson's plans to the Minister of Works and Buildings and a Redevelopment Office was set up with Percy Johnson-Marshall heading a team of two other architects and three engineers.[19] Within weeks of starting their Civic Survey work the three architects were called up and women architects took their places.[20] Coventry now had permission to

[15] Gibson Coll., 'Plan E H Ford'. Print annotated by Gibson.
[16] Hodgkinson (1970), p.171
[17] 'Coventry. 2: Post-war: A plan for redevelopment', *AJ*, 24 April 1941, pp.277-281
[18] CHC CCC minutes, 25 February 1941.
[19] Johnson-Marshall was called up in 1941 and posted to India, as a Captain in the Royal Engineers, in 1942. In India he became General Secretary of the Service Architects' Organisation and through lectures, articles and radio broadcasts, actively promoted planning and reconstruction. When the war ended he was seconded to the Government of Burma to advise on planning and reconstruction: Percy Johnson-Marshall Collection, Edinburgh University Special Collections Division: http://www.johnson-marshall.lib.ed.ac.uk/cgi-bin/view_isad.pl?id=GB-0237-PJM-INDIA&view=basic [accessed 15 April 2006]
[20] Johnson-Marshall (1966), p.294

resume house building and work was under way on an estate in Canley. The erection of specially designed temporary shops was bringing some normality back to the city centre and, on a lighter note, the department was designing a mobile theatre, complete with dressing rooms, to travel around the city on two lorries.[21]

As the Redevelopment plans proceeded Gibson faced a dilemma over the cathedral. Lord Iliffe had offered to pay for a large model of the city centre scheme and the cathedral, as the fulcrum of the design, had to be shown, but should it be as ruins, reconstructed, or as a new building? The Provost of the cathedral, Richard Howard, had vowed to rebuild, but likewise had no real idea of what course to take. In June 1941 he wrote privately to Sir Giles Gilbert Scott and in July contacted Ernest Ford, Donald Gibson and former Mayor Joseph Holt, with a series of questions concerning rebuilding.[22]

Ford favoured following closely the line and style of the old cathedral.[23] Interestingly, considering that the central redevelopment scheme was now essentially Gibson's, Ford referred to the 'scheme which I have shown on *my* [author's italics] plans for the new City re-development'.[24] Joseph Holt favoured rebuilding the cathedral as it had been, on the same site.[25]

Gibson took two weeks to reply, because 'the problem is such an important one, I wanted to set out my reasons as clearly as possible'. [26] He saw no value in preserving the ruins as ruins, and thought that 'the building should be quite new and quite free in its conception'.[27] New methods of construction should be used: 'the idea of height and lightness, large windows, slender

[21] *AR*, October 1941, p.110; CHC Scrapbook of 'Architect's Department News Cuttings'.
[22] Cathedral Archive, 'Coventry Cathedral Reconstruction Correspondence: Sir Giles Gilbert Scott with Provost R T Howard 1941-1948' (CA/CCRC)
[23] CA/CCRC letter Ford to Howard, 30 July 1941.
[24] Ibid.
[25] CA/CCRC letter Holt to Howard, 30 July 1941
[26] CA/CCRC letter Gibson to Howard, 15 August 1941
[27] Ibid.

supports, would all tend I think, to produce a magnificent building.'[28] In trying to live up to the ideals of the Christian faith, the building should be a truthful expression of contemporary architectural knowledge, and it contain 'as many of the arts, such as music, sculpture and painting, as possible.'[29]

In March 1942 the Cathedral Council appointed Sir Giles Gilbert Scott as architect for the new cathedral.[30] He was informed about the new civic centre and met with Gibson 'once or twice', but, according to Gibson, neither Scott nor Bishop Haigh ever discussed the relationship between the cathedral and the city with him.[31]

Gibson's proposals, meanwhile, were attracting increasing criticism. Coventry's Chamber of Commerce insisted on a road through the precinct so that shoppers were not divorced from their cars (see Figure 34), and the Government began to retreat from the advice Reith had given. Promises of money were replaced by strict financial limits and a protracted battle commenced between the City Council and Whitehall, one determined to realise its plan, the other to determined to reduce its scale and ambition.[32]

In May 1945 the Council staged a Municipal Exhibition which covered every aspect of the Corporation's work.[33] The City Architect's stand was not given any special prominence, but the Iliffe model was on display with Scott's Cathedral at the centre of the scheme (see Figure 35).[34] The exhibition handbook noted that, of the original twenty-eight personnel of the Architect's Department, thirteen members had been called up for war service and it

[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] CA/CCRC Coventry Cathedral Council meeting, 9 March 1942
[31] Notes, courtesy of Dr Louise Campbell, taken from Gibson interview carried out by Bill Lancaster and Tony Mason 8 October 1985, transcript p.36. The location of the interview recording and full transcript is currently unknown.
[32] The disagreements over the reconstruction plans are detailed in Hasegawa (1989)
[33] CHC Box G1a – Exhibitions: *Municipal Exhibition Souvenir Handbook* (Coventry, City of Coventry, 1945), exhibition held 28 May to 8 June.
[34] Ibid., plan, p.55

acknowledged that the Department had 'found it necessary to seek the assistance of private practising architects' to help during the emergency.[35]

The year marked the 600th anniversary of the Incorporation of Coventry which, fittingly, coincided with Hogkinson's mayoral year. In October celebrations for the end of hostilities, the city's anniversary and the bright new future that awaited its citizens, came together in the 'Coventry of the Future' exhibition.[36] The exhibition was the culmination of the propagandist and educational work which the Council and Architect's Department had carried on throughout the war. From roads and transport, to industry and housing, public services and recreation, there were models and displays to show the public what the future held for them. The exhibition began with an introduction 'in which the attention of the visitor is drawn to the necessity to plan' and the need for planning to have 'the support of enlightened public opinion'.[37] Visitors then followed a prescribed route through the displays to the culmination of the exhibition: the plans for the city centre redevelopment and the Iliffe model. The exhibition, equipped with a café, and a cinema showing films on planning, rebuilding and housing, was seen by over 57,500 visitors.[38]

As the city's plans moved slowly forwards, Gibson took every opportunity to promote the redevelopment plan and to literally set it in concrete by erecting permanent, visible symbols of the scheme: the levelling stone, marking the central axis of the proposed Precinct, was ceremonially laid in 1946 to celebrate Victory Day;[39] a gift of bulbs from the people of Holland was used by Gibson as leverage to obtain Ministerial permission to commence work on the central

[35] Ibid., p.17
[36] CHC *Coventry of the Future: Guide to the exhibition* (Coventry: City of Coventry, 1945)
[37] Ibid., p.4
[38] *Camera Principis,* Vol 14 No.114, November 1945, p.3
[39] CHC PA 623 Gibson handwritten notes: B. 'The Levelling Stone in the Precinct', February1972

Broadgate area;[40] a 'Savings for Reconstruction' exhibition in 1948, provided the opportunity to mark the top of the Precinct with a tall aluminium mast, bearing the Elephant and Castle of the City Arms,[41] and for Princess Elizabeth's official opening of Broadgate, in May 1948, the lower part of the first column of the Precinct was constructed.[42] Thus by 1948 Gibson had succeeded in marking out the main axis of the central development.

Whitehall continued its attempts to reduce and dilute the Council's proposals, while material and labour shortages added to Gibson's difficulties. Work was under way on housing and schools, but Coventry's factories offered considerably better wages and conditions than the construction industry and, by May 1949, only 1.67% of the city's workforce was engaged in construction, as opposed to 2% nationally.[43] The shortage of accommodation in the city meant that Gibson was also finding it hard to fill key posts in the Department. In March 1949 the Council decided to allocate housing to key personnel and accommodation for nine architectural assistants and two planners was approved.[44] Although progress was now visible around the city, there was little movement in the central area until work finally commenced on the first of the city centre buildings, Broadgate House, in early 1949.

At the end of September 1949 Ernest Ford retired and Gibson finally gained the role he had long sought, becoming City Architect and Planning Officer.[45] Ford was appointed Chairman of the Cathedral Reconstruction Committee early in December.[46]

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[40] Ibid., F.'The phisical (sic) start of Coventry. The rebuilding of Broadgate'(sic), February 1972.
[41] Ibid., D. 'The Elephant Mast in Broadgate', February 1972; *CET,* 22 April 1948.
[42] *CET,* 12 May 1948 and 22 May 1948; Due to steel rationing, architect Brian Bunch had to obtain ¾ ton of black market steel rods for the column's reinforcement: Gibson Memorial Celebration 2 April 1992.
[43] Tiratsoo (1990), p.55
[44] CHC Scrapbook 'Architect's Department News Cuttings', *CET*, 11 March 1949.
[45] *CET*, 30 September 1949.
[46] *CET*, 9 December 1949.

As Gibson and the Council struggled to push their plans forward for the central area, progress on the cathedral had been equally slow and problematic. Bishop Haigh, whom Gibson 'never took to', was replaced by Neville Gorton in 1942.[47] Gorton took a very different view on the requirements for the cathedral and Scott had to re-examine the design. His final plans, published in 1944, attracted widespread criticism and despite several revisions, Gorton eventually turned to Gibson for help in removing Scott from the appointment.[48]

Gibson was a willing ally; desperate to see a modern building at the centre of his redevelopment plans, he had been 'dismayed' by Scott's design.[49] He suggested that the RIBA should be asked to help to set up a competition, but the Institute's President, Lancelot Keay, would not support the idea.[50] The Royal Fine Art Commission became involved and, according to Gibson, visited Coventry in 'dribs and drabs', allowing him 'on each individual visit […] to "chat them up"'.[51] They eventually decided that they could not approve Scott's plans. Gorton then approached Lord Harlech and asked him to set up an independent commission to consider the cathedral design.[52] Eventually, towards the end of 1946, Gorton and Gibson's machinations succeeded and Scott tendered his resignation.[53]

Gibson was invited to meet Harlech to discuss the kind of building he wanted and he tried to steer Harlech away from what Scott had produced.[54] The report of the Commission was published in July 1947. It recommended that only the tower and spire of the old cathedral be retained, that the new building be of

[47] CHC PA 623 Gibson, 'The New Cathedral', February 1972, p.1
[48] The debacle over Scott's designs is detailed in Campbell (1996)
[49] CHC PA 623 p.2
[50] Ibid.; Keay (PRIBA 1946-48) was Liverpool City Architect and Director of Housing. In view of Scott's eminent status and his work on Liverpool Cathedral, Keay could not have been expected to support efforts to remove Scott from the Coventry appointment.
[51] CHC PA 623 Gibson, 'The New Cathedral', February 1972, p.3
[52] Campbell (1996), pp.28-30
[53] Ibid., p.30
[54] Lancaster and Mason interview transcript p.37.

red sandstone in the English Gothic tradition and that an open competition be set up for the design.[55] The Town Clerk was asked whether Gibson would join the Board of Selection, but vetoed the idea, so Gibson 'had to stand aside and hope for the best.'[56]

It would take three years for the competing views and interests of the Bishop, Cathedral Council, Provost, Chapter and the laity on the Reconstruction Committee to be pulled together into a brief for the competition.[57] The appointment of Ford as Chairman of the Reconstruction Committee, in 1949, brought a new dimension to the problem. As Campbell points out, Ford 'was more traditionally minded than either the Bishop or the Provost', and he caused problems particularly for Gorton.[58] Perhaps ten years of battling against the Modernist ideas of Gibson and his architects had left him more determined to make the most of a position where his voice once again carried weight.

Gorton wanted to have a functional modern building, in which the traditional internal arrangements of a cathedral were reinterpreted. He wrote to the assessors for the competition, Edward Maufe, Sir Percy Thomas and Howard Robertson: 'functional the new City buildings will be; and functional the Cathedral must be in its own nature.'[59] The tacit suggestion that the new cathedral might resemble the new city centre must have horrified Ford.

In October 1950 the competition conditions were published. Stylistic requirements had been dropped and LCC Architect Colin St John Wilson wrote in *The Observer*: 'the moderns are now entitled to enter the fray'.[60]

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[55] Campbell (1996), p.31
[56] Lancaster and Mason interview transcript p.37; CHC PA 623 Gibson, 'The New Cathedral', February 1972, p.4
[57] This difficult period is detailed in Campbell (1996)
[58] Campbell (1996), p.41
[59] Ibid., p.41; the assessors chosen by the RIBA were Edward Maufe, Sir Percy Thomas and Howard Robertson,
[60] Quoted in Campbell (1996), p.40.

Spence recalled in *Phoenix at Coventry* the 'irretrievable loss he had felt' on learning of the destruction of the cathedral, he also recalled lying in a dug-out just off the Normandy beaches in June 1944 and telling an army friend that his ambition was '"to build a cathedral"'.[61]

After demobilisation Spence had returned to Edinburgh, briefly rejoining Kininmonth in practice at Rutland Square. He quickly gained two London exhibition commissions for 'Britain Can Make It' and 'Chemistry at Your Service', sponsored by ICI, both staged in 1946, and was then appointed as Chief Architect for the 'Enterprise Scotland' exhibition, to be held in Edinburgh in 1947.[62] The relationship between Spence and Kininmonth was becoming strained and with the financial security of his exhibition commissions Spence split from Kininmonth, in November 1946, to start his own practice: Basil Spence and Partners. He took with him several commissions together with an architect, draughtsman and two apprentices from Rutland Square, and set up an office in a townhouse in Moray Place.[63]

The house was organised in a similar way to Lutyens's London premises with the family living above the office; this was an arrangement that Spence would repeat in London. Within twelve months the firm was well established. Hardie Glover and Andrew Renton joined the practice and Spence was spending a lot of his time in London. His 1947 diary records business related meetings all over the country; he was also becoming increasingly involved in the RIBA and was elected as a Fellow in 1947.[64]

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[61] Spence (1962), pp 13-14.
[62] Edwards (2007), p.52
[63] He took Architect Bruce Robertson, who became his first partner and chief draughtsman Leslie Rowarth: Fenton 'Basil Spence in the 1930s and 1940s', unpublished essay for AHRC Spence research project
[64] Information Clive Fenton; Application for Fellowship in Spence Biographical File, RIBA Library, elected FRIBA on 15 April 1947.

Spence's housing work at Bannerfield, Selkirk, and Summerfield, Dunbar, led to the commission for two estates at Sunbury-on-Thames (see Section 6.1.). The design work was carried out at Moray Place rather than in London, but following Spence's selection in 1949 to design the Sea & Ships Pavilion for the Festival of Britain he decided that a permanent office in London would have to be set up. Andrew Renton, having been plied with sherry and gin late one evening, agreed to become partner-in-charge of the new office.[65] Spence had also been asked to design the Exhibition of Industrial Power at Kelvin Hall, Glasgow, but given the small size of his Edinburgh team, agreed instead to co-ordinate the project and design some of its elements. Glover did much of this work from the Moray Place office.

The premises of the new London office, in Buckingham Street, were shared with two other Festival architects, Goodden and Russell. Spence's practice gradually expanded; David Walker's research records fourteen members of staff.[66]

Although Spence had gained a first class reputation for exhibition design and found the work 'interesting, exciting and lucrative', he was concerned that he was 'becoming known as an "exhibition architect"':[67]

> My real interest lay in "solid work". The ephemeral character of exhibitions, which at their best, are only a form of architectural journalism, did not appeal to me and I was seriously thinking of throwing everything up and going to America.[68]

The publication of the conditions for the Cathedral Competition, in October 1950, gave Spence another focus and provided something 'calculated

[65] Andrew Renton interview with Bruce Youell, 27 September 1979: notes courtesy of Brian Edwards.
[66] David Walker, 'The Practice History, 1950-1960', unpublished essay held in the AHRC Spence Project archive.
[67] Spence (1962), p.15
[68] Ibid.; Andrew Renton recalled that Spence was thinking of joining Frank Lloyd Wright: Renton interviewed by Youell

to stimulate the imagination and kindle the enthusiasm.'[69] He and his wife visited Coventry and it was in that first visit that 'the idea of the design was planted.'[70]

Spence approached the project exactly as he did every scheme: carefully considering the brief, visiting the site and then, through an almost instinctual decision process, formulating an initial design concept which, in essence, would remain little changed throughout the course of the project. The arrangement and form of the new Cathedral, depicted in Spence's first sketch plan, changed very little throughout the gestation of the design.

The initial scheme was worked up by Spence, in Edinburgh, working late at night after the office had closed. One of the most distinctive features of the design was the 'saw-tooth' form of the nave walls (see Figure 36). Spence always ascribed this idea to a dream he had after passing out in his dentist's chair while having a tooth extracted.[71] Research suggests, however, that if Spence saw the entries for the RIBA's 1949 Soane Medallion prize, the seed of the idea may have been planted then. The Medallion brief was for a large Anglican parish church and the winning entry, by Trinidad and Tobago architect Colin Laird, was published in the *RIBAJ* in February 1950.[72] One of its most distinctive features was the saw-tooth plan of the nave walls, which directed light towards the altar (see Figure 37).[73] Given his involvement in the RIBA it is very likely that Spence was aware of the Soane entries, perhaps the details were unconsciously filed away to await recall in the dentist's chair.

In May the Festival of Britain opened. Over twelve months previously the *Guardian* had reported on an exhibition of architects' drawings and models for

[69] Spence (1962), p.15
[70] Ibid., p.18
[71] Ibid., p.24-5
[72] Maxwell Fry, 'RIBA Prizes and Studentships: Criticism of Designs', *RIBAJ*, February 1950, pp.130-133
[73] Ibid., pp. 130-31

the Festival, held at the RIBA (see Figure 38). Judging by the models on display the correspondent felt that there could be 'no doubt that the one which will draw the largest crowds is the Sea & Ships Pavilion of Mr Basil Spence'.[74] He was proved correct and the Sea & Ships Pavilion was judged by public and critic alike to be one of the most successful of the exhibition.

As the Sea & Ships Pavilion drew the crowds, Spence finalised his entry drawings for the Cathedral and was among the many architects who delivered their entries to the Secretary of the Reconstruction Committee on the closing date; 219 submissions were recorded by the Committee.[75]

On 28th July 1951 the *Woman's Illustrated* published an article by Godfrey Winn about Coventry.[76] He had asked Gibson what he thought visitors would find on the Cathedral site 'ten years hence'; Gibson had 'weighed his answer carefully' and said that if Christ was asked the question he would want the Cathedral to be built only after 'every house that is needed, every building that is required to make your city happy and beautiful and useful, is completed.'[77] He believed the building should not be on the site of the ruins which should remain as they were, with a Chapel of Unity at one side; 'now and always a memorial and a reminder.'[78]

The answer revealed a mellowing in his attitude from almost exactly ten years earlier when he had seen no reason to retain ruins as ruins; now he understood their deeper value and voiced the opinion of most Coventry citizens.[79] It also, however, pointed to difficulties ahead for whoever won the Cathedral competition because, in voicing 'Christ's' opinion, Gibson was

[74] *Guardian*, 8 March 1950
[75] Spence (1962), p.29; Campbell (1996), p.45
[76] Godfrey Winn, 'Godfrey Winn says go to Coventry and see how a new and optimistic city has risen from the ashes of the old', *Woman's Illustrated*, 28 July 1951.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] CA/CCRC letter Gibson to Howard, 15 August 1941

actually alluding to the hardening attitude of the City Council, who saw the Cathedral as a potential drain on already scarce materials and manpower.

In August the assessors visited Coventry to look again at the competition submissions and Gibson was invited by Howard Robertson to view the drawings on display. Having been shown the three which the assessors had singled out, Robertson asked whether he saw any of them 'fitting in' with his city plans:

> I said: That one does certainly. I would like to see that one. They said, oh that's interesting. We rather think the same way. So I went away, and that was Basil's scheme. […] I liked it. I think it was terrific.[80]

The winner was announced on the 15th August and Hodgkinson was asked to make a speech. He wanted to know whether the design 'was it going to be the jewel in the sea of the central redevelopment?' Gibson had no doubts that it was and told Hodgkinson 'it reveals a lot of divine inspiration and will outlast the critics'. For Spence, once the initial shock and delight had passed, came the reality of being thrust into a maelstrom of differing views and factions as Bishop, Provost, Cathedral Council, Chapter and laity all sought something different in the design.

The win meant changes in Spence's London office and in 1952 the practice moved to Queen Anne Street. Once again Spence lived above the office and, in 1953, his family moved from Edinburgh to join him. Moray Place continued to deal with most of the practice administration and accounts.[81] As the move took place, however, work coming into the London office dried up. At the end of 1953 Spence returned from fund raising for the Cathedral in Canada

[80] Lancaster and Mason interview, transcript p.37.
[81] David Walker, 'The Practice History, 1950-1960', unpublished essay held in the AHRC Spence Project archive, p.5

to find the firm on the edge of bankruptcy and, in order to meet his bank's demands, Spence had to lay off many of the staff.[82]

In addition to his worries about the London office, Spence was struggling to reconcile the various parties involved in the Cathedral design. Then, as he was reducing his staff, Coventry City Council began to impede the project. Work on Broadgate House, the flagship building of the central redevelopment had begun in 1949, but material shortages were still hampering progress. The Council's plans to start on the second block of the Precinct were stopped by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government which refused to sanction a loan.[83] Now the Council believed that the Cathedral, which had been the fulcrum of the redevelopment plan, would drain the few available resources. By late 1952 their opposition had become clear, and in early 1953 they 'initiated a vigorous campaign to postpone' the Cathedral.[84] Sidney Stringer, leader of the Labour group took part in a radio broadcast which discussed the Cathedral and said that housing should come first.[85]

The Reconstruction Committee's application for a licence to build, although agreed by the Ministries involved, was opposed by the City Council. Gibson found himself in a very difficult position, caught between his employer's opposition and his own support for Spence. Hodgkinson was in a similar position: 'I was caught between friends in the Labour Party and friends in the cathedral […] I had to stress the local priorities for houses, schools, a hospital and health centres, and the men, money and materials to build them'.[86]

Spence found 'the attitude of the Coventry City Council incomprehensible', but wrote of Gibson 'I can truly say that without his help we

[82] Ibid., p.5
[83] Tiratsoo (1990), p.77
[84] Campbell (1996), p.133
[85] Ibid., p.135
[86] Hodgkinson (1970), pp.200-1

could not even have started. His position was extremely delicate but I could always rely on his help.'[87]

In December 1953 the Ministry of Housing and Local Government announced a more flexible building licensing system, but the City Council still opposed a licence application for the Cathedral, announcing that the time was 'not opportune for the re-building […] to be commenced'.[88]

In March 1954 the Minister of Works, David Eccles, invited Stringer, Hodgkinson and Councillor Roberts to London discuss the matter with him and reminded them that the Cathedral was of national and international interest.[89] Ten days after the meeting Eccles wrote to the City Council and copied the text to the press. The cathedral, he believed, was a symbol for post-war Britain. It did not concern Coventry alone: 'the echo of the bombs which destroyed your city was heard around the world'.[90]

The building licence was issued in May and Hodgkinson as chair of the Planning and reconstruction committee finally was able to say that the council now felt 'that the new Cathedral fits beautifully into the central redevelopment'.[91] As the problems for Spence's London practice had coincided with the worst of the tensions between the Council and Cathedral, so the news that work could start in earnest coincided with a sudden flood of commissions.

Three of these commissions came in Coventry when Gorton asked Spence to look at the problem of providing three parish churches for new estates in the city; Tile Hill, Henley Green and Willenhall. A scheme had already been submitted but the costs meant that Gorton's desire to have a church and

[87] Spence (1962), p.100
[88] Campbell (1996), p.137
[89] Campbell (1996), p.138
[90] Ibid., p.139
[91] Campbell (1996), p.140

attached hall for each estate could not be met.[92] Spence was certain that 'a simple direct, topical and traditional' solution could be found.[93]

George Wimpey & Co were already engaged in the city building 'no-fines' houses and Gorton suggested that they might be able to build a vicarage for the Tile Hill site. Spence saw the potential for 'no-fines' to be used for the church buildings as well and discussed the matter with Gibson. In August 1954 they met with Wimpey's and a month later the contractor produced costings of £15,000 for each complex which provided for all the buildings which Gorton required, within the budget.[94]

Spence's solution to the design problem was a standardised set of structures: church, church hall and bell-tower, which could be grouped according to the particular location and which provided scope for alterations in windows and detailing which would give individuality to each church complex.

The reinforced concrete bell-towers were perhaps the most distinctive aspect of each group (see Figure 39), but the stark simplicity of the churches was also striking. Almost industrial in their form and size, and certainly in their construction, they provided a space for worship which would not have been alien to their congregations, the majority of whom were factory workers.[95] The use of the same constructional materials as the houses of the estates also suggested a strong and fundamental link between the church and the community.

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[92] David Walker, '"No-fines" churches in Coventry', p.3. Unpublished essay produced for AHRC Spence project, held in AHRC Spence archive.
[93] Ibid., p.3
[94] RCAHMS MS 2329/ENG/10/13 Letter Gibson to Spence 13 August 1954; Walker, 'No-fines churches', p.10.
[95] Spence said that the open framework of the bell-tower was inspired by St Johannes' Church, Basle, by Burkhardt and Egender, but in form and proportion it bears a closer resemblance to Pietro Belluschi's Central Lutheran Church, Portland, Oregon, 1948-50: http://www.centralportland.org/history.htm [accessed 10 January 2008]

Gibson's last correspondence with Spence over the churches was in November 1954, when he suggested an alteration to the layout of the Willenhall site. Gibson left Coventry for Nottinghamshire in January 1955, just after the Cathedral contract was finally signed between the contractor, Laing's, and the Reconstruction Committee. Work on the estate churches did not start until 1956.

Although Spence no longer had to contend with the City Council, a crisis over the original estimates for the work brought a new set of challenges. In the autumn of 1955 Ford retired from the Reconstruction Committee due to ill health and another point of tension was resolved. He died in November and only two weeks later Spence had to face the news that Bishop Gorton had died suddenly. The tragedy removed a dear friend and one of Spence's staunchest supporters, but his replacement, Bishop Cuthbert Bardsley, proved to be 'a real "St Michael"' and took up the fight for the Cathedral.[96] Ford's replacement, Sir Fordham-Flower, likewise proved to be a staunch supporter and had a 'liberal and appreciative attitude to modern art', which endeared him to Spence.[97]

With building work finally under way on the Cathedral the work load for Spence's Queen Anne Street office grew. Spence was appointed architect for Nottingham University Science Campus in 1955 and for Southampton University the following year. Various projects, including the redevelopment of Edinburgh University, brought considerable work into the Moray Place office.

In 1956 Spence opened new premises at 1 Canonbury Place. Once again the family moved to live over the office and Andrew Renton remained at Queen Anne Street. Spence took his Cathedral team and a few selected architects to Canonbury, and the nature of the office organisation now changed.

[96] Spence (1962), p.84
[97] Ibid., p.82

Canonbury became the creative hub of the Spence practices, a relaxed *atélier* where his 'élite' team developed his concept sketches and solved problems which might arise in the other offices.[98] Queen Anne Street became 'an intense hothouse' where the working drawings were produced.[99]

Assistants from Queen Anne Street and sometimes Moray Place would be invited to work with the Canonbury team in the early stages of the design process. They would take the projects away to develop the working drawings which would then be returned to Canonbury 'to be polished up' before going back to Moray Place or Queen Anne Street.[100]

Spence kept a close eye on the design process and would visit the drawing boards at night leaving notes, sketches and suggestions. He also maintained control over the Moray Place office; Hardie Glover and Peter Ferguson, although they had been made partners, contacted Canonbury 'almost daily' for approval on design decisions and even colour schemes.[101]

Spence's election as President of the RIBA, in 1958, came at an enormously busy time for the practices and Andrew Renton grew restive, both with the division of labour and with Spence's insistence that work was attributed to the practice rather than individual designers.[102] Eventually in April 1961 he parted from Spence. Most of the Queen Anne Street team decided to stay with Renton and he took over the lease of the premises.[103] Spence split his

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[98] Walker, 'Practice History 1950-1960', (2009), p.9. Unpublished essay produced for AHRC Spence project, held in AHRC Spence archive.
[99] David Walker, 'Practice History 1960-1970', (2009), p.1: unpublished essay produced for AHRC Spence project, held in AHRC Spence archive; This working division, something which Gibson had sought to avoid in his Coventry office, eventually played apart in Renton's decision to set up his own practice.
[100] Walker, 'Practice History 1950-1960', p.11
[101] Ibid., p.9
[102] Thorn House, London, was conceived and developed by Renton and his Queen Anne Street team, but Spence insisted that it was attributed to the practice rather than Renton: Walker, 'Practice History 1960-1970', p.2; This attitude contrasts sharply with Gibson's desire to credit assistants wherever possible.
[103] Walker, 'Practice History 1960-1970', p.2

Canonbury Practice and set up a new office in Fitzroy Square, this became the production office while Canonbury remained the *atélier*.[104]

When Renton left Basil Spence & Partners, Glover and Ferguson formed a partnership, severing all financial and legal ties with Spence's London office. In May 1962, just after the consecration of the Cathedral, Joan Spence sold the Edinburgh premises to Glover, Ferguson and Basil Spence and Moray Place became solely office space.

[104] Ibid., p.4

5. The Growing Strength of the Post-War Public Sector.

> It would perhaps be more correct to regard the private practitioner as an offshoot of the official and to see in post-war growth a return to the original conception of architecture as a state service.
>
> Anon., 1938.[1]

In 1942 John Summerson considered the state of the profession in 'Bread & Butter and Architecture' and produced a prescient assessment of how architectural practice would progress after the war, particularly the public sector.[2] He highlighted how views had shifted from 1925, when salaried architecture had been 'entertained by the unambitious and the not very talented', to 1935, when it 'demanded to be taken very seriously'.[3]

The architectural opportunities of the future were 'more likely to lie in the hands of administrative authorities and commercial corporations' than in private hands, and 'intelligent and imaginative' offices, such as Keay's in Liverpool, would prove attractive to young architects as they provided 'bread, butter and the opportunity to build'.[4]

While the change of attitude towards salaried employment had been rapid, the response of the conservative RIBA had been slow and the departmental principal and the '"salaried" man in a humbler position' had, he noted, 'lately become vocal, not to say truculent'.[5] The RIBA was, he believed, now in a curious position. Having surrendered the granting of architectural degrees to a statutory Registration Council, it had 'placed itself under the obligation to serve members in ways substantial enough to make their subscriptions worth while. It

[1]'The architectural organisation of His Majesty's Office of Works', *OA,* January 1938, p.129
[2]Summerson (1942), pp.233-243
[3]Ibid., p.234
[4]Ibid., p.234-5
[5]Ibid., p.236

cannot live indefinitely on prestige and the services of a superb library'.[6] The Institute would have to start to 'promote the interests not merely of "architecture" […] but of architects'.[7] More controversially, Summerson believed that the RIBA would 'have to develop into something rather like a Trade Union'. It would also have to become 'a centre of, or at any rate the mouthpiece for, technical research'. AASTA, as he had already mentioned, had produced a 'remarkable literature of reports and recommendations' resulting from its war-time research into emergency building techniques'.[8]

Looking beyond the RIBA, Summerson predicted that large private firms would become larger and effectively become 'departments' with their own quantity surveyors and structural engineers.[9] Official departments would also need to absorb such specialised staff leading to 'all-in' offices, something which was already happening. Although it was unclear how much reconstruction work would go to official departments, Summerson was certain that they would have survived the war better than private practices and for offices such as Liverpool, Leeds and Coventry, the 'opportunities [would] be substantial'.[10] Private architects might 'receive parcels' of local authority work, but he doubted that this would be encouraged and foresaw large unified schemes being carried out by official architects.

He sounded a note of warning, however, pointing to the '"stale chocolate" and, in fact, stinking rubbish' which had come out of 'dreary departments'.[11] The best architecture was still coming from the private sector, but only because conditions in the public sector did not 'attract the best brains'.[12] 'Energetic

[6]Summerson (1942), p.237
[7]Ibid., p.237
[8]Ibid., p.236
[9]Ibid., p.237
[10]Ibid., p.239
[11]Ibid., p.240
[12]Ibid., p.240

pioneer work' was needed and he hoped that the initiative would come from the architectural profession, either through the RIBA or through AASTA, who would 'press for a standard of organization and working conditions in architectural departments so that a sense of individual responsibility is retained, [and] the slur on "salaried" practice is wiped out once and for all'.[13] Although many of Summerson's predictions proved correct, his hope that the slur would be removed from salaried practice was never fully met.

This chapter will consider the post-war growth of the public sector up until 1958, the point at which sweeping changes within the RIBA became inevitable and Spence assumed both the Presidency and the responsibility for instituting the reforms. It will examine how the RIBA dealt with the continuing issues of status and representation and explore how the relationship between the Institute and the public sector changed as the latter became dominant within the RIBA Council. It will also explore the roles played by Gibson and his colleagues in that process.

5.1. A change in the public/private relationship.

During the war years building work was geared almost exclusively to the war effort and architects were able to do little more than carry on a series of theoretical debates. The end of the war allowed them to focus once again on the practical side of their profession and on the prospect of starting reconstruction work. The promise of a swift start was hampered, however, by rationing of materials, a shortage of building workers and the limits of building licences.

[13]Ibid., p.241

Private architects in particular struggled, as Spence discovered when he returned to practice with Kininmonth. The reputation he had created as an exhibition designer stood him in good stead and brought in a series of exhibition commissions which culminated in the Sea and Ships Pavilion for the Festival of Britain, 1951.[1]

The shift in patronage to the state sector meant that official architects had too much work, rather than too little, but they were still subject to the same materials and labour shortages as the private sector. In Coventry, Gibson made as much use of private sector architects as he could, but faced regular complaints from builders regarding building licence regulations and in 1946 was forced to suspend the issue of all building licences for a period, due to labour shortages.[2]

Concerns over the rapid expansion of the public sector and the possibility of this working to the detriment of the private sector, led to the appointment of an RIBA Committee in 1948, to 'consider the present and future position of architects in private practice'.[3] With the future of the private sector dependant to a great extent on the granting of public sector contracts, the Committee was, unusually, fairly evenly balanced with five private sector representatives and four public.[4]

The Committee reported that fears of unemployment in the private sector had 'so far, proved needless', but in this respect the timing of the report was unfortunate as it preceded a general downturn in the building industry which

[1]Brian Edwards, 'Exhibition Design' in Long and Thomas (2007), pp.49-61; other exhibitions included 'Britain Can Make It', 1946; 'Chemistry at your Service', London, 1946; the Council of Industrial Design's exhibition, for Enterprise Scotland, 1947 and the Scottish Industries Exhibition, Kelvin Hall, Glasgow, 1949.
[2]*CET,* 8 October 1946.
[3]*AJ,* 23 November 1950, p.414
[4]*AJ* Ibid., p.416: The salaried members were: Aslin, Hertfordshire County Architect; Matthew, Architect to the LCC; Forshaw, Chief Architect and Housing Consultant to the Ministry of Health, and Howitt, Manchester City Architect.

reduced considerably the work available for the next two years.[5] Nevertheless, the Committee made several recommendations intended to ensure the continued health of the private sector. They wanted the competitions system to be more widely employed and suggested that local authorities should be encouraged to consider using younger private practices alongside more established firms, when two or more projects were awarded.[6] When work loads for public departments increased they felt that it would be best for them to call on private practices rather than temporarily increase their staff.

The Committee also felt that busy practices should be encouraged to introduce profit sharing or bonus schemes and that principals should consider either creating new partnerships, or enlarging existing ones. Where architects found it difficult to set up new practices for financial reasons, or because office accommodation or assistants were in short supply, it urged that they consider sharing office space and staff.[7]

Finally, broad guiding principles had to be established regarding the relationship between the two sectors and the ways in which the private architect might be employed, not only architecturally, but as a specialist consultant and planner.[8]

The *AJ* asked representatives of the ABT, the IAAS and the Institute of Registered Architects to give their thoughts on the report and it is interesting to see that the comments of the IAAS representative echoed many of Summerson's predictions: the growth of the big private offices; the fact that the 'old patrons of architecture' were a 'dying race'; the fact that 'the small office is

[5]Ibid.
[6]Ibid.
[7]*AJ,* 23 November 1950, p.416
[8]Ibid., p.416

being squeezed out', and the fact that a 'successful practice may result from the unity of an architect, an engineer and a surveyor operating under one roof'.[9]

These changes also pointed towards another shift in the pattern of patronage which would become evident over the next two decades, namely the growing dominance of large, prestige practices that were able to gain sizeable local authority contracts, often as direct commissions through their contacts with heads of architectural departments, rather than through competition.[10]

Gibson does not appear to have shown any particular favour towards Coventry architects, but he did have a fairly close relationship with the Coventry Society of Architects. He naturally mixed a great deal with private Principals in Coventry, and the Architect's Department was situated in the centre of the largest concentration of private practices in the city. Several of Coventry's leading private architects also had periods of employment in Gibson's department.[11]

In awarding work to non-Coventry architects, Gibson clearly made good use of his contacts. This was particularly evident in his school building programme; Richard Sheppard, the Architects' Co-partnership and Edric Neal all designed schools for the City and Gibson's close friendship with Stirrat Johnson-Marshall brought three Ministry of Education development projects to Coventry.

An interesting assessment of the relationship between the city's public and private sectors appeared in the *AJ* in 1953 in a special report on Coventry.[12] The article noted that the relative prosperity of the city meant that a single man

[9]Ibid., p.417
[10]John R Gold, *The Practice of Modernism: Modern architects and urban transformation, 1954-1972* (London & New York: Routledge, 2007), pp.57-60
[11]The appointments of Rolf Hellberg, L A Clarke and F Barnard Reyner were approved in June 1940 (E&PC 3 June 1940). Maurice Harris, who joined Hellberg to form the Hellberg Harris Partnership, also worked in the City Architect's Department in the 1940s. Roland Sidwell worked there after the war and Peter Burgoine worked in the department from 1939-1950.
[12]*AJ,* 8 October 1953, pp.446-458

practice ‘could be sufficiently lucrative to […] run a good car, pay for some whole-time domestic help, and live in a house in the centre of the town’; an unusual state of affairs in the profession.[13]

The city’s private architects gained work from the Architect’s Department, but Gibson was ‘no mere philanthropist’. He made judicious use of the private architect and, if they were working on Corporation housing schemes, would take back large parts of the scheme if they were slow to get under way.[14]

While the article suggested that private architects seemed on the whole to be happy with the relationship with Gibson’s Department, there was one point of serious contention between the two groups. Amongst the innovative approaches Gibson had taken to architecture in Coventry was the decision to hand over a housing and flats project, in the Canley area of the City, to Birmingham School of Architecture. The project was a large one, of around £40,000, and students were to design the dwellings and then supervise the site-works and construction.[15] Gibson’s decision had ‘aroused considerable opposition from local architects’ who felt that the project was too big and that similar projects would reduce the work available to the private sector and, consequently, its capacity to employ such students when they qualified.[16]

The writer noted that public/private rivalries occurred in every town which had a thriving public architectural office, but concluded that Gibson seemed ‘to have won, to a remarkable degree, the support of his fellow architects’.[17]

Gibson’s department had been one of AASTA’s successes and its staff had benefited from group-working and Gibson’s own enlightened approach to organisation and responsibility. More generally the shift in architectural

[13] *AJ,* 8 October 1953, p.446
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., p.447
[17] Ibid.

patronage to the public sector did not lead to the improvement in conditions and perceptions of status which official architects hoped for. Enlightened departments, such as Coventry and the LCC, became attractive places to work, but a review of the organisation of public offices in *Keystone*, July-August 1947, found that most were still generally inefficient, muddles were prevalent, revisions too frequent, and technicians were dissatisfied and cynical about their employers; it was 'not usually with pride that technical men say "I work for the Ministry of --- or the --- Borough Council"'.[18]

It is clear from reading the report that the Association's efforts to reform office practices that were detrimental to the architect's status had brought little overall change. Instead, after long public employment, technicians effectively succumbed to the system and would find it difficult to get jobs outside. There was, the report noted, 'some justification for the sneer that public offices are a refuge for failures.'[19]

In 1942 AASTA became the Association of Building Technicians (ABT), but from the late 1940s the ABT began to lose some of its force.[20] Since the mid-1930s, the Association had attracted a highly committed, vocal and activist membership, including names such as Leslie Nash, Cleeve Barr, Kenneth Campbell, Anthony Cox, Percy Johnson-Marshall, David Percival and Arthur Ling.[21] All of these figures, however, were connected with the Communist Party and, from around 1949, following the widespread backlash against communism, the ABT's membership began to fall as a result of this association.[22]

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[18]*Keystone,* July/August 1947, p.141
[19]Ibid.
[20]The change in name was intended to encourage a more egalitarian focus and provide a wider membership base.
[21]Stephen R Parsons, 'Communism in the Professions: the organisation of the British Communist Party among professional workers, 1933-1956', PhD Thesis (University of Warwick, 1990), p.436
[22]Parsons (1990), p.459. ABT membership fell from 3,906 in December 1947 to 3,097 in December 1950

Ironically, this loss of strength led to a change in tactics which would eventually succeed where the ABT had failed: placing public sector architects in control of the RIBA. Most notably Cleeve Barr, former Communist and outspoken critic of the Institute, would be given charge of constitutional reforms during Spence's Presidency and would serve as Honorary Secretary during Gibson's Presidency.

As the ABT began to lose force during the late 1940s, a group of its leftwing architects began to look for ways to reform the RIBA from within, rather than without. The group, which included Percy Johnson-Marshall, consisted mainly of architects from the LCC and they turned for support to prominent public architects of less overtly political affiliation: Robert Matthew, then chief architect to the LCC, Robert Gardner-Medwin, chief architect and planning officer to the Department of Health for Scotland, Stirrat Johnson-Marshall, chief architect to the Ministry of Education and Gibson, then city architect and planning officer for Coventry.[23]

This select group represented a variety of public offices: governmental, county and city. Although prominent within the public sector they were not at the top of the RIBA and they represented the younger, modernist generation rather than the older generation of County Architects. Only Matthew and Gibson had experience of serving on the Council. All of them, except Gardner-Medwin, were Associates and, perhaps with the exception of Matthew, all were happier organising things behind the scenes rather than being centre stage.

This quartet was, therefore, ideally suited to instigating change inside the Institute without creating too many waves. According to Saint they became 'an informal "upper house"' and met regularly with each other and with the ABT

[23]Saint (1987), p.245

group, or ‘lower house’, usually in the Bride of Denmark, Queen Anne’s Gate.[24] At these gatherings, often prior to RIBA Council meetings, decisions would be made on tactics in Council and ideas would be discussed for election campaigns, candidates and voting strategies.[25] The ‘lower house’ eventually became ‘a more organized cabal known as the Chain Gang’ and drew additional members from the Hertfordshire, Coventry and Nottinghamshire architects departments and from the Ministry of Education.[26]

Of the ‘upper house’, Stirrat Johnson-Marshall was the leading figure and the only one who regularly attended meetings. He was certainly the senior strategist and, as Saint points out, while Johnson-Marshall was little more than monosyllabic in Council, everything had usually been sorted out and agreed before hand.[27] An examination of his attendance figures for Council show that of the four men he attended most regularly.

Gibson was equally unassuming and equally good at working behind the scenes. He probably did much of his work through his Coventry Department and certainly had very strong support from them. From the opening of the Department in 1938, his staff played active and prominent roles in AASTA, later the ABT; several, including Percy Johnson-Marshall, David Percival and Charlie Bornat were also Communist Party members.[28] Gwyn Morris, a member of the ABT General Council in 1945 and at one time Vice-President of the Association, rose to become Principal Architect for Housing in the Coventry Department.[29] He also played a prominent role in the RIBA, where he served as

[24]Saint (1987), p.245
[25]Ibid., p.246: ‘hardly a candidate promoted by the “Chain Gang” and its allies failed to win election’.
[26]Ibid., p.245
[27]Saint (1987), p.246
[28]Parsons (1990), p.438: Percival was Chairman of the ABT during the 1940s; Bornat was an active and lifelong member of the CPGB: interview with CPGB member Peggy Walford 4 April 2007,
[29]MRC MSS.78/BT/1/3/13 ABT Minutes 1945; Morris joined Coventry City Engineer’s Department in 1932 and moved to join the newly created City Architect’s Department in 1939,

a Licentiate member on the Council for many years; and was a member of the Architects' Registration Council UK, the Finance and General Purposes Committee, the Professional Purposes Committee, the Practice Committee and the Salaried and Official Architects' Committee, for which he was also the representative on the Council.[30] Attendance figures for Council meetings, which were published in the *RIBAJ* for a while, show that he never missed a meeting.[31]

As the 'lower house' grew in strength and organisation, new tactics came into play. Since 1950 the *AJ* had invited a guest editor to join the editorial board each year. The first had examined private practice and the second looked at the relationship between the contractor and the architect. In 1952 the chosen subject was public architecture and the Journal invited Matthew, Gibson, Stirrat Johnson-Marshall and Gardner-Medwin to share the guest editorship.[32] Percy Johnson-Marshall was the unnamed fifth member of the team and drafted the essays which appeared in the *AJ*. [33]

For twelve months, all aspects of public architecture were discussed, from its aims, to office organisation, its impact on the building industry, technical education, salaries and collaboration between public and private offices. From the origins of the public architect, in figures such as Inigo Jones, Wren and Nash, and the beginnings of the State sector, they moved on to the contemporary State sector and issues such as patronage and 'low salaries and low grading' which were 'still a barrier to the production of good Public Architecture.[34]

CET, 6 May 1955. He rose from Senior Architectural Assistant to Principal Architect for Housing.
[30]*RIBAJ,* May 1952, p.240; *RIBAJ* Annual Report of the Council for the 1954-55 Session.
[31]*RIBAJ,* May 1953, p.278; *RIBAJ,* May 1954, p.266
[32]*AJ,* 24 January 1952, p.114
[33]Saint (1987), p.245
[34]*AJ,* 14 February 1952, pp.206-208; *AJ,* 13 March 1952, pp.327

On the adjacent page to this particular article was a letter from three Perth architects, complaining about salary scales which they believed made them 'one of the lowest paid of the technical-professional bodies'.[35] A lengthy correspondence followed and in April a letter was published from twenty-nine members of the City Architect's Department, Coventry.[36] It was redolent with the rhetoric which AASTA had employed at the height of its disputes with the RIBA in the 1930s and, although there is no direct evidence, it is possible to see this letter as the work of the 'Chain Gang', picking up the issue of salaries and starting to move forward an agenda which would result in all four of the 'upper house' having a seat on the Council after the elections.

The correspondents agreed with many of the views expressed by the Perth architects, and accused the RIBA of 'negligible' effort on behalf of its members:

> The apathy of the RIBA is deliberate, the policy of a council interested in the preservation of private practice for the few and consisting mainly of private employers, their inactivity is quite understandable – employers do not advocate raising employees' wages when it affects their pockets.[37]

The RIBA had to change and the answer lay in the hands of salaried members who formed the majority within the Institute:

> redemption of the RIBA from its present stagnation is constitutional. If salaried architects took an interest in their local societies and the RIBA council by voting only for salaried men and withholding votes for architects in private practice, a new and virile institution could be created
>
> In view of the fact that the council of the RIBA has a majority of Fellows, it is the duty of all salaried architects who are eligible for this class of membership, to take the added responsibility and act rather than talk apologetically of the effete RIBA. It is also the duty of all members to vote intelligently and to see that salaried architects are well represented on the governing body of their professional and learned society.[38]

[35] *AJ,* 13 March 1952, p.327
[36] *AJ,* 10 April 1952, p.446
[37] Ibid., p.446
[38] Ibid., p.446

The letter received a great deal of support and also succeeded in provoking a response from the RIBA, through Leonard Howitt, Chairman of the Salaried and Official Architects' Committee. He accused the Coventry correspondents of displaying 'a lack of knowledge and understanding of the work and objects of the RIBA' and of his Committee, and of making the 'mischievous and completely unwarranted charge that the policy of the RIBA Council was deliberate apathy'.[39] Their attack was 'unjustifiable and unpardonable' and he regretted the fact that the appeal to members to take an interest in the Institute was linked to such 'ungracious and unfounded allegations'.[40]

This response served only to attract further support for the Coventry architects, together with repeated calls for salaried members to 'use their vote and right of nomination' in the forthcoming elections for Council.[41]

The list of official Council nominations, published in April, had offered little hope to the salaried sector, but there was an option for additional nominees to stand if they had the backing of seven or more subscribing members.[42] Gardner-Medwin, Johnson-Marshall and Gibson duly put their names forward for election.[43] The results were announced on the 17th June and all three joined Matthew on the Council; presumably benefiting from their frequent appearances in the *AJ* and the groundswell of support following the Coventry letter. Gibson and Johnson-Marshall topped the Associates' list, with 2,668 and 1,309 votes respectively and Gardner-Medwin comfortably joined C H Aslin and Leonard Howitt as an elected Fellow.[44] Gwyn Morris was elected as the Licentiate

[39]*AJ,* 1 May 1952, p.536
[40]Ibid., p.536
[41]Ibid., p.596
[42]RIBA Council Nomination List 1952-53, sent out with the May edition of the *RIBAJ*
[43]*RIBAJ,* May 1952, p.247. Gibson was nominated by seven senior members of his department who also nominated Gwyn Morris.
[44]*RIBAJ,* July 1952, p.309

representative. It was an overwhelming success for the 'upper house' and the 'Chain Gang'.

The success of the campaign is highlighted when the election results for 1951 and 1952 are compared. In 1951 four out of the ten available seats went to architects who had been or were in the public sector.[45] In 1952 this rose to seven out of ten seats.[46]

Following their success in the election, the *AJ's* Guest Editors continued their consideration of the salaried sector, examining the role of the Chief Architect and the responsibility of the group leader, 'building controls and public architecture' and 'the public architect and town planning'.[47] The thrust of this final essay was that 'the architect should equip himself to be an architect-planner and the co-ordinator of the planning team'.[48] This was a theme which would become dominant during Spence's Presidency of the RIBA, in relation to the architect's role in new motorways.

The Council elections for 1953 saw the salaried sector further increase its presence on the ballot paper. In 1951, 27% of Fellows and 43% of the Associates nominated had worked, or were working, in the public sector; by 1953 this had risen to 43% and 50% respectively.[49] Matthew, standing as a nominee of the Council in 1953, was re-elected and Percy Johnson-Marshall, whose nominees included Gardner-Medwin and Matthew, joined the Council as an Associate.[50]

The constitution of the Council had been a long-running issue of contention between the Institute and its salaried members and, with an

[45] *RIBAJ*, July 1951, p.337
[46] *RIBAJ,* July 1952, p.309
[47] *AJ,* 9 October 1952, pp.428-9; *AJ,* 23 October 1952, pp.488-9; *AJ,* 18 December 1952, p.727-728
[48] *AJ,* 18 December 1952, p. 727
[49] *RIBAJ,* July 1951, p.267; *RIBAJ,* May 1953, pp.274-278
[50] *RIBAJ,* May 1953, pp.274-278; *RIBAJ,* July 1953, p.349

increased presence on the Council, official architects again turned their attention to constitutional reform. Having fought unsuccessfully against the preponderance of Fellows on the Council and rules which effectively barred most salaried architects from Fellowship, official architects subtly shifted the focus of their attack. It was now argued that the 'Council no longer reflected the composition of the general body of members adequately, and that in particular Associates were much under-represented'.[51]

At the 1954 AGM a committee, including Gibson and Kenneth Campbell, was set up to investigate the matter.[52] Importantly for salaried Associates, the Committee found that the qualifications for Fellowship 'did to some extent operate to the detriment of salaried architects' and recommended that 'some wider interpretation should be given so as to place salaried architects on a more equitable footing with principals in private practice'.[53] It was also recommended that as from 1st January 1956, all applicants for the Fellowship must submit drawings and photographs of work, and attend an interview.

In considering the constitution of the Council the Committee discussed two issues: firstly, that the Council was not sufficiently and truly democratic, and secondly, that it did not reflect the composition of the body of the membership. The Committee felt that to deem the Council undemocratic was 'to a great extent a misconception', for 33 of the 72 Council members were elected by ballot and 30 were elected or appointed by Allied Societies.[54]

It recommended, however, that the composition of the elected section of the Council should change from 21 Fellows, 9 Associates and 3 Licentiates, to 9 Fellows, 9 Associates, 3 Licentiates and 9 corporate members of any class of

[51] *RIBAJ,* May 1955, p.279
[52] Ibid., p.279
[53] Ibid., pp.279-280
[54] Ibid., p.281

membership.[55] Honorary Officers would still have to be Fellows and their method of their selection would remain unaltered, as would the appointment of *ex officio* members.[56]

The recommendations, to be implemented in 1957, were largely a cosmetic exercise and while appearing to reduce the dominance of Fellows on the Council, did nothing to address fundamental concerns about the undemocratic nature of the Council.[57]

While the constitution of the Council was under consideration, the RIBA had acknowledged that 'an appreciable degree of dissatisfaction' existed among salaried members with the negotiating bodies that represented them. The Council therefore began a process of consultation to gauge the depth of feeling amongst members and to assess what could be done to help them.[58] It stated clearly, however, that any 'substantial demand for more effective representation would have to be met by an organisation outside the RIBA, but having its full support and goodwill'.[59]

In response to the initial questionnaire, nearly 6,000 members agreed that more effective representation was needed, but when the Council detailed its final decisions, in January 1955, it stated that it 'would not sponsor a new organisation of a trade union nature'; it would not single out any existing organisation for 'preferential support' and members should join existing organisations.[60]

The decisions were extremely disappointing for the salaried sector, but, regardless of the findings of the consultation, the RIBA had few options open to it. Its Charter prevented it from acting as a union or negotiating body and the

[55] *RIBAJ,* May 1955, p.281
[56] Ibid., p.281
[57] *RIBA Annual Report of the Council for the year 1955-1956* (April 1952), p.2
[58] *RIBAJ,* May 1955, p.296
[59] *RIBAJ,* May 1955, p.296
[60] *RIBAJ,* January 1955, p.119. Letter sent to all members and students

long history of antipathy between the RIBA and the ABT (formerly AASTA) made sponsorship of a new organisation, or support for an existing one, very problematic.

On the 3rd May 1955, the membership turned out in large numbers to discuss the proposals at the Institute's AGM.[61] Thurston Williams, an architect with the LCC, opened the meeting by moving the motion that the AGM did not support the Council's decisions on representation and asked them to reconsider the matter.[62] Voicing dissent at an AGM marked a very significant change in the relationship between members and the Council, as Williams noted he was 'perhaps creating a piece of history for the Institute'; the Secretary had informed him 'that no motion has been moved before this annual general meeting for 40 years'.[63]

Opposition to the formation of a new Union was expressed by those who believed that it would take too long to establish a membership base, and therefore the negotiating power, which existing bodies possessed. Support for a new organisation came from Guy Oddie. He pointed out that there was a potential conflict between the egalitarian basis of a union such as NALGO and the aspirations of professional architects, which limited the union's ability to adequately represent, or negotiate on behalf of, its professional members.[64]

Thurston William's motion was carried by 224 votes to 87.[65] Despite this, however, the RIBA failed to resolve the issue and in 1958 official architects set up the Local Government Architects' Association, 'to strengthen immediately the representation of architects in the negotiating machinery affecting their conditions of service'.[66] Two hundred and forty architects joined at the inaugural

[61] *RIBAJ,* May 1955, p.295 450 attended the AGM
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid., p.295
[64] Ibid., p.298
[65] Ibid., p.300
[66] *RIBAJ,* July 1958, p.293

meeting.[67] Interestingly, despite the Institute's statement that it would not support any particular negotiating group, the RIBA Secretary attended a meeting of the Association in January 1959 and said that the Institute would be able to offer 'tangible help' although he was not sure what form that would take.

In 1955 an ad hoc committee was set up to examine the representation of members in salaried employment and to review the structure of the profession. Chaired by Richard Sheppard, the committee was widely respected and very influential as regards RIBA policy. Among its members were Stirrat Johnson-Marshall and Gibson. Other members included Dan Lacey who worked with Gibson in Nottinghamshire and John Barker, who had headed one of Gibson's school teams in Coventry.[68] The same names also sat on the Salaried and Official Architects' Committee, with the addition of Percy Johnson-Marshall, Gwyn Morris from Coventry, and Henry Swain from Gibson's Nottingham team.[69]

As the public sector gained increasing representation on important committees and on the Council, it also began to influence the Board of Architectural Education, beginning with the election of Modernists Stirrat and Percy Johnson-Marshall to the Board in 1953.[70] Architectural education was still structured according to Beaux-Arts principles and, despite the gradual incorporation of Modernism into the system, few schools of architecture had actually overhauled their curricula to integrate fully the new approach to design. As a student commented in the *AJ* in 1952:

> constructional design is regarded (and taught) very largely as a craft technique of typical details, with rational, that is to say scientific aspects of design […] tacked on awkwardly as something else to be applied.

[67] *RIBAJ,* September 1958, p.361
[68] *RIBAJ Annual Report 1956-57*
[69] *RIBAJ Annual report 1955-56* p.8
[70] RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/1/135 2 July 1957 Council minutes; Crinson & Lubbock (1994), p.118 & 128

> There is not yet a satisfactory integration of the traditional and the new approaches.[71]

In 1954 moves to reform the system of architectural education received support from the new President of the RIBA, Charles Aslin. Together with Stirrat Johnson-Marshall and William Allen, chief architect to the BRS, he began to plan the reconfiguration of architectural education along Modernist lines.[72] The election of Gibson, Lionel Brett, Robert Matthew and Leslie Martin to the Board of Education eventually gave the Modernists the upper hand and the takeover was completed in 1958, with the Oxford Conference on Architectural Education.[73]

The Conference was carefully managed and the majority of its selected audience represented Modernists within the profession. The chairman of the conference, Sir Leslie Martin, presented his report to the RIBA Council in May 1958 and all of its recommendations were approved in principle: entry requirements should be raised from the minimum of five O-levels to two passes at A-level; courses based on testimonies of study and RIBA external examinations should be abolished; all schools of architecture should be situated in Universities or Institutions of a comparable standard; courses should be full time or sandwich course and post-graduate work should be considered as an essential part of architectural education.[74]

While, as Crinson and Lubbock assert, the Oxford Conference was a carefully staged consolidation of changes which had been taking place over several years, rather than the watershed it was claimed to be, it was

[71] *AJ,* 20 March 1952, p.356
[72] Ibid., p.134
[73] Ibid., p.128
[74] *AJ* (22 May 1958), pp.772-777 Conference held April 11-13

nonetheless decisive and put Modernists and - almost by definition - official architects in control of the Institute and architectural education.[75]

When Spence became President in 1958, the constitution of the council had changed little, but its underlying make-up was now very different and the salaried sector was in place to make the most of the opportunity to bring sweeping changes to the Institute.

In 1941, calling for unity among architects, Cecil Stillman had written that private architects could 'look to Official Architects for energetic support and cooperation, provided this is reciprocated and old barriers are completely and finally broken down'.[76] For a while it looked as though that just might be possible.

[75]Crinson & Lubbock (1994), p.137
[76] *OA,* February 1941, p.75

6. Housing

> If architects and builders, owners and tenants worked together to secure sound and sensible building, our towns would become pleasant living places.
>
> Ministry of Health Housing Advisory Committee, 1939.[1]

The large and complex topic of public housing provision in the twentieth century has received a great deal of critical assessment. It has been examined from the perspective of the establishment of the Modern movement in Britain, individual housing types, structural systems, individual estates and from political and social viewpoints; Darling has examined the role of the pre-war Modernists in housing provision, Finnimore has explored system building and the welfare state, Glendinning and Muthesius focussed on tower blocks, Bullock has examined housing within the wider context of Modern architecture in Britain during the first post-war decade, and Gold has explored housing provision within the establishment and practice of Modernism. This chapter will not reiterate the work already published on housing; it will offer instead a focus on certain works of Gibson and Spence, to provide a comparison of their architectural approach and to examine their responses to the tensions of material and labour shortages.

Apart from his work for the War Office, which brought him back into contact with housing through army accommodation, Gibson's involvement in housing was concentrated in Coventry, ranging from single experimental dwellings to small estates and larger neighbourhood unit schemes. His main contribution to housing was in the sphere of developmental and experimental work and he was a member of the Committee for the Industrial and Scientific

[1] *Houses We Live In*, (London: HMSO, 1939)

Provision of Housing (CISPH), which was set up by Alderman Harry Weston, Chair of Coventry's Housing Committee, he also served on the Government's Central Housing Advisory Committee.[2]

Spence carried out private and public housing projects throughout his career, but, as Glendinning notes, his work was in contrast to that of specialist housing architects where 'consistent lines of development in house-types or layouts could be followed over many years.'[3] Spence 'took on commissions for housing […] on an ad hoc basis, and thus each one was designed largely from first principles'.[4] Whether he was working on a single storey house for a school caretaker, terraced council housing, inner-city flats or the massive twenty-storey blocks of the Gorbals, each project bore an individual signature.

The schemes which will be considered are Spence's two estates for Sunbury-on-Thames Urban District Council, particularly Laleham Road, and Gibson's proposals for Stonebridge Highway, Coventry; all three schemes were planned during the mid 1940s.

As the Government explored the issue of post-war reconstruction and the organisation of the building industry, housing formed a central part of that discussion. By early 1942 the outlines of a housing programme had been drafted and investigations were under way into how houses would be built and how they should be planned. The Burt Committee was set up to investigate non-traditional methods of building which might help in the reconstruction process and the Dudley Committee was convened to explore the kinds of accommodation which would be needed and to look at internal planning and spatial requirements. This Committee published its findings in 1943 as *The*

[2] CISPH see White (1965), pp.124-31; *CET*, 1 January 1951
[3] Glendinning, 'From Genius Loci to the Gorbals', in Long & Thomas (2007), p.87
[4] Ibid.

Design of Dwellings. It recommended an increase on pre-war space standards and the adoption of more mixed developments which would cater for all types of household, from single people and families to the elderly. It also broke with pre-war orthodoxy and argued for higher densities in housing per acre and in the number of people who could be housed per acre in flats.

The evidence given to the Committee had shown a marked preference for houses rather than flats and for them to be planned with a small working kitchen, a dining/living room and, ideally, a separate sitting room or parlour.[5] The report eventually recommended three basic plan types, one for rural housing and two alternative layouts for urban houses: the first based on a dining-kitchen with an attached utility room and a separate living room; the second with a working kitchen, which brought together washing and cooking rather than having a separate scullery, and a larger living room which included a 'dining niche'.[6] On the basis of evidence to the Committee, this latter plan was the least popular, nevertheless it was seen to offer a more flowing spatial arrangement and fitted with concepts of flexible space and open-plan living and the 'through' living/dining room became a standard housing layout.

The Dudley Report provided the basis for the Government's *Housing Manual 1944* and together the two documents 'established a new orthodoxy'.[7] The *Housing Manual* looked towards a 'simplification of construction and the widest possible use of standard supplies', which would reduce costs, improve quality and 'bring within the reach of the workers a variety and quality of equipment hitherto impossible in local authority housing.' [8]

[5] Bullock (2002), p.157
[6] Ibid., p.158
[7] Ibid., p.158
[8] *Housing Manual* (London: HMSO, 1944), p.24 & 25

The *Manual* also, indirectly, highlighted the low place which housing had traditionally held within the architectural hierarchy:

> Successive Ministers of Health have drawn attention to the importance of employing qualified architects on housing work. […] It is essential that the housing schemes promoted by local authorities should set a good standard for the country […] and that this standard should apply, not only to accommodation and construction […] but also to questions of arrangement, taste, and harmony with the surroundings, which largely depend on professional knowledge and its right application. The services of an architect should therefore be secured by local authorities for their housing schemes.[9]

Housing for the majority of the population, particularly low-cost housing had rarely been considered worthy of architectural input and the profession had been content to leave it to the local authority surveyor or engineer. Although 'young Modern architects determinedly entered the sphere of low-cost [housing] provision' in the late 1930s and despite the increasing numbers of local authorities which had appointed city or borough architects, it was still very common for housing provision to be dealt with by the department of the surveyor or engineer.[10]

The tensions and suspicions between the professions have been discussed and their difficult relationship was underlined by the *Housing Manual*'s emphasis on the relationship between architect and surveyor: 'it is of special importance that there should be effective co-operation between him and the surveyor to the local authority'.[11] The architect had to understand that the surveyor knew the site and area, but the surveyor had to recognise that 'the houses are the most important part of the scheme, […] and that however

[9] Ibid., p.9
[10] Miles Glendinning & Stefan Muthesius, *Tower Block: Modern Public Housing in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994), p.12; Birmingham's City Engineer and Surveyor, Herbert Manzoni, was responsible for housing until the appointment of a City Architect in 1952 (Carl Chinn, *Homes for the People* (Birmingham: Birmingham Books, 1991), p.107). LCC housing was put under the control of the Valuer in 1945 and only returned to architectural control in 1949 (Glendinning (2008), pp.81, 117-20)
[11] Ibid., p.10

efficient the layout may be from an engineering point of view, where an architect is designing the houses, the best result will not be achieved if the site plan is determined without his co-operation.'[12]

Despite this advice many private architects taking on local authority work were handed schemes in which the roads had already been established, as was Spence in his work in Sunbury-on-Thames.

6.1. Spence: Sunbury-on-Thames Housing Schemes, 1945-1952

'another unorthodox venture'

Evening Standard, 1951[1]

When Spence parted from Kininmonth in 1946 he took with him several projects including two local authority housing schemes at Dunbar and Selkirk.[2] Work began on the first phase of the Bannerfield scheme, Selkirk, in 1947 and in the same year Spence was commissioned to carry out two housing schemes for Sunbury Urban District Council; his first architectural work outside Scotland.

In January 1950 the *AJ* published J M Richards's review of his 'Buildings of the Year: 1949'.[3] As he pointed out 'housing' now meant 'local authority' and while there were 'plenty of ugly council houses being dumped down on ill-considered sites or strung out in a line along main roads' there had been 'generally speaking a real advance [...] since before the war in the intelligent siting and grouping of local authority schemes'.[4].

[12] Ibid., p.10
[1] *Evening Standard*, 17 August 1951
[2] He took with him the practice's chief draughtsman Leslie Rowarth, architect Bruce Robertson and 2 apprentices.
[3] *AJ* 19 January 1950, pp.73-4.
[4] Ibid., p.73

Among the housing projects he chose to discuss were 'two exceptionally agreeable smaller schemes designed for local authorities by private architects'; one by Hughes and Bicknell in East Anglia, the other by Spence at Sunbury-on-Thames.[5] He had included some houses in Newport in his review, but felt that the East Anglian and Sunbury schemes both showed 'greater refinement of detail [...] and a more interesting use of materials'.

What Richards found 'remarkable', however, was the 'similarity of style' in the schemes which, he believed, suggested 'that an accepted idiom for small house design may now be establishing itself, using proportions and mannerisms that future historians will identify as belonging quite unmistakeably to the mid twentieth century.[6] He was correct in his assessment and the features which he noted: the squarish windows with an unequal sub-division; sharply projecting box-like window surrounds; low pitched roofs; a flat slab over the porch and exclusive use of gable ends, are all now unmistakeably of their era, but Spence was not merely designing in the 'accepted idiom,' but, as will be seen, introducing new ideas.

The design work for Sunbury was carried out in the Edinburgh office and on-site work began on the first of the schemes, Sunbury No.7, in January 1949.[7] The fifteen and a half acre site, to the south of the Laleham Road, Shepperton Green, had already had the roads laid out before Spence took over the housing.[8] The brief was to provide 164 dwellings, in a mixture of one and two bedroom flats, two and three bedroom houses and housing for the elderly.[9]

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[5] *AJ* 19 January 1950, p.74
[6] Ibid., p.74
[7] *The Scotsman,* 14 July 1951, attributed the opening of Spence's first London office to the Sunbury project, but it was actually set up in response to Spence's appointment to design the Sea & Ships Pavilion for the Festival of Britain.
[8] *The Builder*, 21 October 1949, p.515
[9] Ibid., p.516

The estate (see Figure 40) was set back from the Laleham Road, with a single, short entrance road on the central axis of the site, running into Moray Place. From here the trapezoidal layout of the roads, converging towards the south-west of the site had a clear *Beaux-Arts* symmetry around the central axis. One internal road ran across the north-east end of the site parallel to Moray Place. At this end of the estate the housing layout acquiesced to the symmetry. People entering the estate from the Laleham Road looked down the central axis of the site, across a large rectangular children's paddling pool, towards the three-storey John Kaye Court which was sited at the centre of the estate. To either side of the axis, two-storey houses in groups of four were symmetrically laid out with four blocks to either side.

To the south-east, however, and around the perimeter of the site Spence avoided the temptation to reinforce the symmetry. Along Preston Road, on the north-west side of the estate, two-storey houses were grouped in pairs and one block of four, and were staggered at an angle to the road, facing south-east. To the south-east, along Greeno Crescent, the paired houses formed a gentle curve and in the central area houses were grouped in terraces of four, six and ten, some parallel to the road and some at an angle to it. No attempt was made to deal with corner sites; these were simply left as open landscaped areas.

Three small squares also helped to break up the symmetry of the layout, but again Spence was not tempted to formalise these, or turn them into insular groups by enclosing them on three sides with houses. Instead the blocks fronted onto the main loop road of the estate. Two single-storey blocks of old people's houses were provided; one terrace of six, at the centre of the site,

fronting onto the square off Preston Road, the other facing onto a square on the south-east edge, together with another three-storey block, Harrison Court.[10]

The design of the houses was governed to a great extent by costs, which had to be ‘most carefully controlled’, but also by shortages of materials, and the Architect’s press release described the character of the scheme as growing 'out of the investigations into materials available at that time'. [11] The houses and flats (see Figures 42 and 43) were traditional, cavity walled, brick built structures, but timber shortages led to the adoption of design features which would reduce the amount of roofing timber used. All the buildings had gable ends rather than hipped roofs and Spence turned to aluminium for the roof covering; this allowed a twenty degree roof pitch to be adopted, which reduced both timber usage and the amount of brickwork needed for gables and party walls.[12] The lightweight roofs also allowed lighter timber trusses to be used.

Aluminium roofing had been used abroad, and by BAC in its AIROH houses and aluminium schools, but this appears to have been the first time it had been used in this country on traditionally built brick houses.[13] Council officials saw it as ‘an experiment in housing and a courageous break with tradition’ and the project apparently drew ‘building students from all over the country […] to see the aluminium roofs’.[14]

Spence also employed aluminium for all door fittings and for balcony railings, trellises, canopies and window boxes; the distinctive balconies of the three-storey blocks had window boxes integral to the railings. All of these were

[10] The houses and flats around Harrison Court have been demolished and the area redeveloped. The remaining three-storey block, John Kaye Court, is currently boarded up and awaiting demolition.
[11] RCAHMS MS 2329/ENG/3/1 undated typescript - presumably a press release.
[12] Ibid.
[13] For BAC see Saint (1987), p.135; RCAHMS MS 2329/ENG/3/2/28 Unsourced news cutting - Dr E G West, Technical Director of the Aluminium Development Association, stated at the official opening of the estate, this was the first such use of the material in Britain.
[14] RCAHMS MS 2329/ENG/3/2/28; *Thames and Twickenham Times*, 26 October 1949.

‘specially designed for prefabrication employing standard aluminium rod, bar and sheet with simple fixings', thereby allowing the ‘lightweight decorative features’ to be ‘manufactured economically and with precision'.[15] Aluminium also 'obviated maintenance and redecoration costs’ and its choice could be ‘justified on economic and aesthetic grounds'.[16]

Although the Architect’s press-release said that the character of the scheme had grown out of ‘investigations into materials available at that time', the result was not unique to the Sunbury development.[17] Many features of the design were also common to the Dunbar and Selkirk schemes, which were under way at the same time. The stairs at Dunbar and Sunbury were lit by ‘French-windows’ which opened inwards with an external balcony railing (see Figures 42 and 44), and trellises were provided beneath the door canopies. All three used low pitched aluminium roofing and all had the same sharply projecting, box-like, concrete window surrounds, with galvanised steel window frames and a similar pattern of fenestration. These features also appear in Spence’s designs of the same period for caretakers’ houses for the Duncanrig and Kilsyth schools.[18]

Despite the similarities, however, while the Sunbury houses were unmistakeably English in appearance, Spence injected a distinctly Scottish flavour into the Dunbar and Selkirk schemes, with roughcast brickwork and skews on the gable ends. For these two sites he also employed a large, projecting chimney stack similar to that used in the CAI house at the 1938 Empire Exhibition, Glasgow (see Figure 28).

[15] RCAHMS MS 2329/ENG/3/1,2; The majority of houses still retain their aluminium front door canopies, but many of the trellises and balcony rails have been removed.
[16] Ibid.
[17] RCAHMS MS 2329/ENG/3/1 undated typescript - presumably a press release.
[18] RCAHMS SGF/1930/3/20/6 Kilsyth, May 1948 also SGF/1930/3/27/5 December 1949 and SGF/1930/3/68/6 August 1952; Duncanrig SGF/1950/3/3/8 December 1951.

At Sunbury the brickwork was painted rather than roughcast, but a ‘major innovation’ was Spence’s bold use of colour. A range of paints was developed especially for the scheme and the buildings were decorated in terra-cotta, blue-white, white and lemon yellow, with doors in ‘contrasted colours’.[19] *The Thames and Twickenham Times* believed that the estate ‘had not a replica in the whole of England and Wales’.[20]

While the Architects’ felt that the use of ‘stimulating and distinctive colours and materials [...] helped to create interest and individuality', the residents do not seem to have taken the same view.[21] The first key was handed to a Mrs Ballard, who told the local paper that she was glad her house was not as brightly coloured as the rest.[22] The paper also noted that local people had been critical and nicknamed the estate 'rainbow corner' and 'tin-pan alley'.[23]

Although the external features and appearance of the estate were innovative and distinctive, the internal planning of the dwellings was fairly standard. The layout of the Old People’s Dwellings was almost identical to the ‘Two person, North aspect’ plan in the *Housing Manual 1949*.[24] The flats, however, differed from the Ministry of Health’s suggested plans in that the living room and kitchen were adjacent to each other and linked by a serving hatch (see Figure 46); all but one of the *Housing Manual* plans divorced the rooms from each other or did not provide a link.[25]

The house plans (see Figure 45) were moving towards a more open layout with ‘through’ living room with dining recess, linked to the kitchen by a serving hatch. Spence was employing similar plans in individual caretakers’

[19] RCAHMS MS 2329/ENG/3/2
[20] *Thames and Twickenham Times*, 26 October 1949; The colour scheme has not survived, the houses are all now painted white.
[21] RCAHMS MS 2329/ENG/3/2
[22] *Thames and Twickenham Times*, 26 October 1949.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ministry of Health (MoH), *Housing Manual 1949* (London: HMSO, 1949), p.74, Fig.47.
[25] Ibid., pp.88-90

houses for schools at Duncanrig and Kilsyth (see Figure 47).As suggested by the Dudley Report, the living room with dining recess appeared in the 1944 *Housing Manual* for 'the smaller family', but continued to be overshadowed by the more traditional dining-kitchen or a separate dining room.[26] In the Sunbury houses the 'modern kitchens', 'planned to please the housewife', were fitted with work tops, cupboards, ascot heater, pantry and gas washing boiler. In the living rooms the tiled surrounds and terrazzo mantelpieces of the fire places had been 'specially designed for the scheme by the architects' and the interior walls were distempered in light colours with the woodwork picked out in bright contrasting colours.[27]

Work on the second of the Sunbury schemes, at Beechwood Avenue, began in 1950.[28] The road layout was very similar to the Laleham Road estate (see Figure 41), with a triangular loop road around the site and one internal road crossing the site parallel to the eastern end of the loop road. Once again the majority of the 190 dwellings were houses and the grouping of blocks at the widest end of the site was symmetrical.

All but four of the houses were grouped in terraces of four, six or eight dwellings, mostly at the eastern end of the site and around the northern perimeter. In the centre of the site a triangular plot of allotments was enclosed by three terraces of houses to the north-east, two blocks of old people's dwellings to the west and five blocks in a stepped pattern to the south; three, three-storey blocks alternating with two terraces of old people's houses. The

[26] MoH, *Housing Manual 1944* (London: HMSO, 1944), p.78, Fig.72; The majority of plans in the *Housing Manual 1949* likewise have dining-kitchens or separate dining rooms. 'Dining spaces' are clearly divided from the living room and where a dining recess is shown as part of the living room, it is not placed adjacent to the kitchen.
[27] *Thames and Twickenham Times*, 26 October 1949; This was in marked contrast to the internal colour scheme for the Caretaker's house at Kilsyth which had white woodwork with walls and ceilings in white, brilliant yellow, deep tuscan red, Wedgewood blue and turquoise: RCAHMS SGF/1930/3/55/10 .
[28] *AJ*, 1 January 1953, pp.18-20

internal planning and detailing of the dwellings was identical to the Laleham Road estate and once again the houses were painted, this time in 'white, deep cream, yellow, pink and duck egg green'.[29] A newspaper report on the opening of the Laleham Road estate had said that 'it was hoped that the colour scheme might be adopted elsewhere', but tastes were more conservative. In 1951 the *Evening Standard*, reporting on the Beechwood Avenue estate, said that the architect of the new Cathedral was 'responsible for another unorthodox venture' and noted that Sunbury Council had decided to plant quick growing creepers 'to tone down the colour scheme'.[30]

Establishing landscaping schemes was important, particularly at the Beechwood Avenue site which had no existing trees.[31] On both sites, although properties had gardens to the front and rear, only the rear gardens were defined by fences. The front gardens were not clearly delineated, but were not considered as communal areas and it would appear that the tenants' treatment of these areas caused the architects some discomfort. In May 1950 an 'Appeal to all tenants of Sunbury-on-Thames UDC housing sites no.7 and No.9', was issued by Basil Spence and Partners. Tenants were clearly expected to appreciate what the architect had done for them and the document offered instruction about the architects' intentions for the scheme and guidance as to how tenants should treat their front gardens.[32] The Architects had, the appeal said, 'fought hard battles to produce these two revolutionary schemes which have been highly praised on the world of Architecture'. They had 'tried to achieve a beautiful whole' and the schemes had 'not been designed for front fences or divisions'. If tenants put up fences this 'would break up the unity and

[29] Ibid., p.20
[30] RCAHMS MS 2329/ENG/3/28; *Evening Standard*, 17 August 1951
[31] *AJ*, 1 January 1953, p.19
[32] RCAHMS MS 2329/ENG/3/22 Appeal to tenants dated 15 May 1950.

everyone would do something different [...] which would soon be chaos!'[33] Parents were asked to help in the matter by insisting 'that their children do not walk on front lawns, pick flowers, nor harm trees'.[34] Tenants had simply to remember 'four easy phrases': '1. Make simple gardens, 2. Be tolerant, 3. Be tidy, 4. Teach others' and in time they would 'produce estates which will be good examples to others, and one of which every tenant is proud.[35]

Although the text of the appeal appears distinctly patronising, it was in keeping with the widespread use of Housing Visitors, tenants' handbooks and the general belief that new council tenants needed help with 'reorientation' when moving to 'a light and airy dwelling on a Corporation Housing Estate with all kinds of unfamiliar conveniences.'[36] The fact that the appeal came from the architect also highlights the fact that public housing had ceased to be simply an issue of providing standard accommodation and had become an architectural concern, with the surrounding environment playing a vital part in the architectural conception.

In 1951 the Laleham Road estate was one of 173 entries for the Festival of Britain Special Architectural Awards and J M Richards' assessment of the scheme as 'exceptionally agreeable' was borne out when it won one of the nineteen awards issued for civic and landscape design.[37] The Laleham Road scheme as it stands today has little to suggest this former architectural success; in-filling, demolitions, and changes in roofing and windows have removed much of the estate's character and individuality and the once distinctive 'rainbow' colouring has disappeared beneath a coat of more orthodox white.

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[33] RCAHMS MS 2329/ENG/3/22 Appeal to tenants dated 15 May 1950.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] 'Housing: Visitors not "Snoopers"', *Coventry Civic Affairs*, April 1948, p.1
[37] *AJ*, 12 July 1951, pp.37-39

6.2. Gibson: Stonebridge Highway Housing Scheme, Coventry, 1946.

A layout for a planned community.

J H Forshaw, 1947[1]

When Gibson took up his post as City Architect in 1939, responsibility for Coventry's housing remained with the Director of Housing, A F Underhill. Following his retirement, at the end of March 1940, all architectural and construction work, together with the architectural staff of the Housing department, transferred to the Architect's Department.[2]

A predicted influx of 36,000 munitions workers during 1940, on top of the city's existing housing problems, led the Ministry of Health to grant special permission for work to be completed on partially built houses and for the Council to commence work on new housing schemes.[3] The Ministry also agreed that work could begin on three Guild Houses to cater for up to six hundred single workers.[4] Hopes that three thousand new houses would be added to the city's housing stock by Christmas 1940 were dashed by the November bombing and the housing crisis intensified.[5]

During the war Gibson carried out considerable experimental work into non-traditional building systems, but despite successful trials the experiments had little impact on Coventry's housing programme. The exception was his use of foamed slag in a housing scheme at Canley.[6] Suggested by Alderman Harry Weston, Chair of the Housing Committee and CISPH, the 'Myko' joists and floor

[1] Forshaw quoted in *CET*, May 20 1947.
[2] CHC HC 15 February 1940.
[3] CHC HC 5 December 1939; CHC PAC 5 January 1940; HC 27 February 1940
[4] *MDT*, 23 March 1940.
[5] *MDT*, 21 March 1940
[6] Shaw MA thesis (1994); *AJ*, 24 April 1941, pp.273-76

slabs proved very successful; timber was removed entirely from the design and even the doors were steel-framed.[7]

In 1943 local authorities were asked to assess their long-term housing needs and Gibson estimated that Coventry's population would reach 250,000 by 1950; this would require 12,345 houses, 31,719 flats and 10,625 places in Guild Houses.[8] In 1944, 1000 prefabricated bungalows were allocated to the city by the Government, provided that the Council could organise sites for them and in 1946 an allocation of 2000 BISF houses was made.[9] These took far less skilled labour to erect than traditional brick houses and offered the hope that housing completion rates might be improved, however, by the autumn of 1946 materials were in increasingly short supply and the city's pool of building labour had fallen dramatically with only a quarter of the necessary workers available.[10]

Gibson's housing team was working on estate designs for green field sites around the periphery of the City and, in January 1947, details were published for a new estate on the south of the city, along the Stonebridge Highway (see Figure 48), which would incorporate forty-eight of the BISF allocation.[11] The *Coventry Evening Telegraph* was effusive in its praise for the 'revolutionary plans', which embraced 'Scandinavian features […] understood by Coventry City Architect's Department to be novel in England'.[12] The scheme provided for 'maximum sunlight, privacy, children's communal play facilities and preservation of natural beauty' and the Ministry's Chief Architect, J H Forshaw,

[7] PJMC GB0237/PJM/CCC/A/2/3 Unsourced article by Kay Vernon, 'City Rebuilds from a waste product'; *OA*, February 1942, pp.81-83
[8] CHC HC, 26 March 1943
[9] CHC HC, 3 October 1944, 12 October 1944 and 16 November 1944; CHC HC, 21 March 1946.
[10] *CS*, 12 October 1946.
[11] *A&BN*, 31 January 1947, pp.93-97
[12] Ibid.

described it as a ‘lay-out for a planned community’ which showed ‘much study and interest in the development of the site’.[13]

The area chosen was just over 22½ acres, on a sloping, south-east facing site with mature trees and hedges which were retained in the plan. The proposals were for a mixed community of 194 dwellings, providing old people’s bungalows, three-storey flats and two-storey houses of three and four bedrooms.

The BISF houses were at the lowest, southern end of the site, forming a distinct group, virtually separated from the rest of the estate (see Figure 48). Here the semi-detached houses were placed in regular, parallel rows at right-angles to the main road, with gardens ‘back-to-back’ to ‘minimise “overlooking”’.[14] Their alignment ensured that they received maximum sunlight and also meant that traffic noise would not hit the fronts of the houses, but would instead be channelled between the rows. At the western end of this block were eight old people’s houses, arranged in a looser grouping with a curving access road, and to the east an area was designated for shops and a public house.

The main body of the estate curved up the slope of the hill to the north-east. Old people’s bungalows, again loosely arranged in pairs and one terrace of four, were sited at the lower end of this area. This placed them close to the shops and ensured that the ‘elderly residents will feel themselves in the midst of the community of young and vital activity surrounding them.’[15] Above this group of bungalows the three storey-flats and terraces of houses followed the contours of the site in *Zeilenbau* rows with four three-storey blocks forming the central spine of the estate. All of the flats and terraces were at right angles to

[13] *CET*, 20 May 1947
[14] *A&BN,* 31 January 1947, p.93
[15] *CET*, 20 May 1947

the main roads of the estate ‘in order to secure privacy, quietness and freedom of movement between one part of the site and another.’[16] They were also arranged so that the principal living rooms faced south, away from the smaller access roads, and looked out over the private gardens and ‘on to the “blind” entrance front of the next terrace’ thus avoiding ‘”overlooking” completely’.[17]

Whereas Spence grouped the houses on the Sunbury estates to create 'self-contained village communities', privacy for householders on the Stonebridge estate seems to have been of paramount importance and there was a clear segregation of housing types.[18] The brick built terraced houses were of two designs and these were arranged in clearly defined groups rather than being integrated across the site. The four-bedroom ‘A56’ type was placed on the eastern edge of the site in six terraces, each of five houses. The three-bedroom ‘A55’ type was placed to the west of the estate in five south facing terraces and five west facing terraces.

The regimented layout of the houses and flats contrasted with the very natural surrounding landscape, most of which was common open space. Only the houses had small private gardens and these were not intended to be fully enclosed, but to blend into the surrounding communal gardens (see Figure 49). Children’s playgrounds and tennis courts were planned between the flats and a stream which ran through the site was intended to feed a boating lake for the children. Allotments were also proposed and sheds were to be built in groups of three at the ends of the houses flanking the flats, thus avoiding the ‘familiar eyesore pattern of […] every kind of shed or outhouse, in all states of repair or disrepair.’[19]

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[16] *A&BN*, 31 January 1947, p.93
[17] Ibid.
[18] *AJ,* 3 November 1949, pp 486.
[19] *CET*, 20 May 1947.

Both house types proposed for the site had mono-pitch roofs and, in elevation, were similar to F W B and F R S Yorke's cottages at Stratford-on-Avon.[20] The mono-pitch roof appeared in many of Gibson's design proposals during the war as it promised to eliminate wasteful roof space and offered material savings and aesthetic benefits. In comparison to the traditional pitched roof, less timber was used, fewer bricks were needed for chimney stacks, gable and party walls, and rainwater goods were only required for the rear elevation; this left the front elevation uncluttered and aesthetically more acceptable.[21]

The planning of the 'A55' and 'A56' had no equivalent in the Ministry's *Housing Manual* and both offered a new, more flowing spatial layout. The 'A56' (see Figure 49) was planned to offer 'flexibility of arrangement for a large family and provided living accommodation which was 'divisible into three separate units'. The large lounge, which ran across the south facing front of the house opened into a dining recess which in turn opened into the kitchen. The dining recess was effectively divided from the lounge by the central fireplace and could be closed off from it by a curtain; this was a very similar plan to that used by Spence in his caretakers' houses for Duncanrig and Kilsyth schools.[22] The 'A56' differed from Spence designs in that the dining recess and kitchen did not have a dividing door and the lounge had two distinct areas: one centred on the fireplace, with direct access to the garden, and a narrower eastern end which opened onto the hall. Effectively the separate areas of the living accommodation formed one space, flowing around the central block of the fireplace, drying cupboard and staircase.[23] A utility room opened off the hall,

[20] F R S Yorke, *The Modern House,* fifth edition (London: Architectural Press, 1944), p. 167; Coventry Housing Committee visited the Yorke houses in 1940 prior to Gibson being asked to design a timberless roof: *MDT*, 19 April 1940
[21] *MDT*, 19 April 1940
[22] RCAHMS SGF/1930/3/68/6 Kilsyth 1952 and SGF/1950/3/3/8 Duncanrig 1951.
[23] The Modernist approach to flowing spatial arrangements and flexibility of space was not appreciated by all prospective tenants; a similar plan, used in two experimental houses at Tile Hill Neighbourhood Unit in 1952, led to comments from visitors that the shape of the living room

with access to the kitchen and a downstairs toilet, and this provided the 'tradesmen's entrance'.[24] Upstairs all four bedrooms had built in wardrobes and the length of the two principal rooms was 'designed […] to divide the rooms into "sleeping" space and "dressing" space.'[25]

The three-bedroom house, type 'A55' (see Figure 50), was a more radical departure from the recommendations of the Ministry's *Housing Manual*. The ground floor was 'L'-shaped with the main entrance at the rear of the property. This opened into a hall which had been 'combined with the dining room to create more "living" space and to give an impression of spaciousness on first entering the house.'[26] The external wall of the dining recess was fully glazed, which added to the sense of space, and a curtain could be used to screen off the area if required. Directly to the left of the door were the stairs, with fuel and bin stores underneath, and the kitchen opened off the dining room/hall area and looked out over the garden. From the kitchen there was direct access to the 'garden shed', which was integral to the house. The refuse bin was housed in a room within the shed which could be accessed by bin-men. Household rubbish could be fed directly into the bin via a chute from the kitchen.[27]

The living room, which opened off the hall, was separated from the dining recess by the chimney breast and formed a single-storey projecting wing at the front of the house; this gave it 'complete privacy and sound insulation'.[28] The projecting living room helped to form a semi-enclosed courtyard for the private garden and the whole of the side overlooking this area was glazed. The

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would create furnishing problems and that the absence of a door between the kitchen and dining area was a drawback in the design: *CET*, 1 May 1952.

[24] Unlike Spence's house designs, separate utility rooms feature in most of Gibson's schemes.

[25] *A&BN*, 31 January 1947, p.96

[26] Ibid., p.96

[27] *CET*, 20 May 1947.

[28] *A&BN*, 31 January 1947, p.96

roof of the living room wing was extended as an open pergola 'in order to give the effect of the garden being an outdoor extension of the living room.'[29] The pergola linked to a loggia, in front of the kitchen and shed, which was formed by the projection of the first floor beyond the ground floor wall line. The loggia provided a covered play area for children which could be supervised from the house.

Upstairs the bedrooms were all south facing and the master bedroom, which ran the full width of the property, was provided with a balcony 'in order to create a sense of contact with the garden below' and to provide views out over the communal gardens.[30]

As the plans for the Stonebridge estate were being finalised, labour problems in the city were intensifying and by August 1946 progress on site preparation had become so slow that the Government withdrew half of the city's BISF allocation.[31] In 1947 erection of BISF houses was further jeopardised by labour shortages and the contractors applied to import labour to carry out the work. The Council's request that the Government pay for this extra expenditure was refused and building work almost ceased. Finally the Council were forced into agreeing to cover the additional costs and had to balance this by reducing further the number of BISF houses they could take. Eventually only around 500 of the original allocation were erected in the City, the majority of these on the Charter Avenue Estate, Canley.[32]

Although road construction and site preparation began at the Stonebridge Highway site in early 1947, general labour and expenditure problems meant that building did not start immediately. Problems dragged on

[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] CHC HC 22 August 1946
[32] *A&BN*, 31 January 1947, p.94

through 1948 and, in 1949, Gibson began negotiations with George Wimpey & Co to build 'no fines' houses in Coventry.[33]

During this period, although the building layout of the Stonebridge site remained virtually unchanged, the housing make-up of the estate was radically altered. In a talk, given in April 1949, Gibson suggested that the city should concentrate on building blocks of flats rather than houses; the new proposals for the estate reflected this view.[34] Work had commenced on the southern section of the site and the old people's bungalows were completed, however, only one row of BISF houses was started and eventually the remaining plots were filled with traditional brick built semi-detached houses. On the main body of the estate (see Figure 51), all of the terraced houses and old people's bungalows were dropped from the plan and the site was entirely given over to blocks of flats, both brick and 'no-fines', following the *Zeilenbau* arrangement of the original plan.[35]

Wimpey's began work on the site early in 1950 and completed eleven, three-storey 'no-fines' blocks (see Figure 52); six of which replaced the proposed terraces of 'A56' houses on the eastern edge of the site.[36] The blocks provided a total of one hundred and thirty-eight two-bedroom flats. The internal planning of these (see Figure 53) was a far more standard affair than the flowing spatial arrangement that had been proposed in the houses, nevertheless, it differed significantly from the recommendations of the *Housing*

[33] No-fines concrete – a mix of Portland cement and gravel or clinker, from which all material less than ⅜ inch was removed. It did not form a flowing cement paste and could therefore be poured to considerable depths between fairly light shuttering of wire mesh and timber. Shuttering could be removed after 24 hours and reused: Albert Lakeman, *Concrete Houses and Small Garages,* fourth edition (London: Concrete Publications Ltd, 1949), pp.84-5

[34] *CET*, 27 April 1949. He suggested that even twenty-storey blocks should be built.

[35] One hundred and ninety-four flats were provided on the estate rather than the original proposal of fifty-four. Only eight of the original twenty old people's bungalows were built and individual housing was reduced from one hundred and twenty units to seventy-six: *A&BN*, 31 January 1947, p.95 and information from site visit.

[36] Richardson (1972), p.226; *A&BN*, 31 January 1947 and information from site visit.

Manual 1949 in the amount of circulation space required inside each flat. Rather than long corridors from which rooms were individually accessed, the 'no-fines' flats had a small entrance hall which gave access to the living room, kitchen and stores, and a further small hall off the living room which led to the bathroom and bedrooms. The space gained allowed for an internal store and fuel store and a larger kitchen and master bedroom than those recommended by the Ministry.[37]

The contract with Wimpey & Co proved successful; the 'no-fines' system was swift, economical and, importantly, Wimpey could provide all the labour needed. In July 1951, on the basis of their work on the Stonebridge Highway estate, the firm was awarded a £1 million contract for over a thousand houses at the new Tile Hill development, the country's first neighbourhood unit. Other contracts followed and eventually the firm completed over 6,000 houses for the Corporation. 'No-fines' was also used with great success by Spence, for his three estate churches in the City: St John the Divine, Willenhall; St Chad's, Wood End and St Oswald's, Tile Hill.

[37] CHC SEC/PL/12/7/1 plans for 3-storey 'no-fines' flats, 10 February 1950; *Housing Manual 1949*, p.88, Fig.66

7. The Post-War School Building Programme.

> Most schools built [...] were models of
> sanitary efficiency, and with few exceptions,
> most were deplorably dull'.
>
> *Official Architect*, 1946.[1]

> My idea of a perfect school, [...] is a beautiful
> shiny thing in the middle of a garden.
>
> Bruce Martin, 1952.[2]

Between 1939 and 1945 school building, along with all non-essential construction work, ceased. The hiatus in production broke the continuum of school design and after the war a markedly different architectural approach emerged. The 1944 Education Act heralded a massive school building programme and presented the opportunity for architects to take a new direction in school design. The design process began to focus on the needs of the child and architecture and planning became essential and formative aids to the learning process, rather than simply a means of producing receptacles for teaching.

Ideas which had received only sporadic realisation before the war now became the norm. Traditional planning was replaced by a move towards spatial flexibility, and learning and teaching became 'the basis of the design of school buildings', a point which Richard Sheppard highlighted as 'the most significant difference between the pre-war and post-war periods'.[3] In an effort to increase production and bypass materials restrictions, architects were actively encouraged to turn to new technologies and to experiment with new methods of construction. As a manifestation of the educational potential and opportunity

[1] *OA,* April 1946, p.210
[2] Bruce Martin, quoted in 'Schools: Report of AA Symposium', *AJ,* 20 November 1952, p.608
[3] 'Report on British Architects Conference', *RIBAJ,* June 1953, p.313

available to the new post-war society, it was intended that the 'beautiful shiny thing in the middle of a garden' would replace the ‘deplorably dull’.

Wartime architectural propaganda had promised rebuilding on new, modern and progressive lines once the war was won. Now that the time had arrived and the profession had to face, and temper, great public expectation. While physical reconstruction and redevelopment, on the scale which many cities had planned, would be a slow, painful and in most cases impossible task, the process of social reconstruction and redevelopment through the educational system was a process which needed to start almost immediately.

School provision provided an important area of collaboration between private and official architects, but the underlying tensions and divisions between the two groups remained. Indeed, new tensions emerged as the balance of power within the profession shifted towards the official architect. The scale of the school building programme meant that most local authorities found it ‘necessary to enlist the services of private offices in order to cover the demand’.[4] While reliance on the spare capacity of the private sector helped the public sector to meet its building targets, many in the private sector became reliant on the awarding of public sector contracts.

Restrictions on building licences and materials, together with the general downturn in the building industry in the early 1950s, seriously affected the private sector. In Spence's case, the scarcity of work coincided with his success in the competition for the new Coventry Cathedral in 1951. He blamed the subsequent lack of inquiries and commissions on peoples’ assumptions that he no longer had the office capacity for other work. This may have been partially

[4] *Official Architecture and Planning* (*OAP*) , July 1953, p.337. C H Aslin speaking at the RIBA Annual Conference

true, but other private practices were suffering similar problems.[5] In Spence's case work on schools in Sydenham, London and Ecclesfield, Sheffield placed his practice in a reasonably stable position.[6]

Gibson's technocratic approach to architecture, and his contacts within the Ministry of Education, ensured that Coventry took full advantage of new building systems and also contributed to developments in school planning and new constructional systems. He readily admitted that his personal input into the design process for Coventry's schools was minimal; though his organisation of the department, and his eagerness to work with innovative and experimental systems, played an important part in the output of the schools groups and the level of satisfaction of the architects involved.[7] When Gibson moved to Nottinghamshire as County Architect in 1955, he set up a department in much the same mould as Coventry, but played a far more personal role in the design and development of the structural system which eventually became the CLASP system.[8]

Few private architectural practices had either the resources or the numbers of schools projects to support and contribute to developmental programmes and their contributions, therefore, tended to be one-off designs.[9] Spence and his practice were no exception and designed seven schools, all of which were very individual projects exhibiting the attention to aesthetics, sympathetic use of materials and sensitivity to site and locality which were

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[5]Anthony Blee interviewed by Bruce Youell 13 September 1979, notes courtesy of Brian Edwards
[6]Ibid.
[7]British Library Sound Archive (BLSA) C447/11/01-02: Gibson interviewed by Andrew Saint, March 1984
[8]Consortium of Local Authorities Special Programme, CLASP, inaugurated on 24 July 1957. The inaugural members were Nottinghamshire; Derbyshire; Coventry; Durham; Glamorgan and the West Riding of Yorkshire. Leicester City Council and Warwickshire County Council agreed initially to build one school each in the CLASP system. *A&BN*, 11 December 1957, p.775.
[9]Richard Sheppard, Robson & Partners were one exception, designing over eighty schools as well as university and college buildings.

fundamental to Spence's architectural ethos. Schools representative of both architects will be examined in more detail at the end of the chapter.

The chapter will begin with a brief examination of some of the factors which impacted on school building and design in the inter-war period. It will look at wartime preparations for the commencement of the post-war school building programme and the requirements of the 1944 Education Act. It will examine the difficulties which architects faced in responding to the requirements of the Act and the architectural dilemmas created by the new comprehensive system.

The proceedings of the 1953 RIBA Conference will be used to probe the challenges of the school building programme and the changing relationship between the public and private sectors..

The final section will examine Spence's design for Sydenham Girls' Comprehensive School and Gibson's work in Coventry which led on to the development of the CLASP system, focussing in particular on Caludon Castle Boys' School as a comparison to Sydenham.

7.1. Prelude to the Building Programme.

Major restructuring of England's education system was set out by the Hadow Committee in 1926; there would be a clear break in schooling at the age of eleven, all-age schools would be eliminated and secondary or 'modern' schools would be provided for those who did not go on to grammar or technical school. Progress towards reorganisation was slow and haphazard and the Depression of 1931-32 further hampered progress.

As the economy began to recover, school provision came to the fore once more. Cecil Stillman, writing in 1949, saw the years 1936-1939 as a period of promise during which 'worn-out theories began to be jettisoned [...]

and a more vigorous and imaginative approach was initiated'. That promise, however, had not been fully realised:

> Unfortunately, progress with but few exceptions, was not as enlightened as this might imply, for the change mainly took the form of a revolt against the Neo-Georgian treatment as such, and amounted to little more than the exchange of one architectural style for another. And, despite some positive improvements, the same rigidity of composition and inflexibility of construction, so apparent in earlier buildings, were to a large degree retained in the schools of this brief but promising period.[1]

While financial restrictions, work load and the power of the BoE clearly played major roles in this lack of architectural progress, the mechanisms of local government also had an effect. In many official architectural departments individual thought was curbed by repetition of existing plans and details. Percy Johnson-Marshall, fresh from the progressive ethos of Liverpool School of Architecture, joined Middlesex County Council in 1937 expecting to use his training on the problems of school design. Instead he was corralled into a ‘plan factory’ and expected to produce elevations of a prescribed style for pre-existing plans.[2]

Due to slow and haphazard school replacement and reorganisation, economic uncertainty, lack of political will and population shifts and growth, the country entered the War with a sizeable shortfall in adequate schools. In September 1939, shortly after war was declared, an embargo was announced on school building.

By 1941, it was clear that post-war reconstruction would be on a scale beyond the capacity of a reduced building industry and restricted resources.

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[1]Stillman (1949), p.17

[2]Saint (1987), p.39; The Middlesex schools were probably the ‘stale chocolate’ to which Goodhart Rendell referred in his Presidential address to the RIBA in 1937 (Ibid., p.38) however, the *AR* believed that Middlesex County Architect’s Department, under the leadership of W.T. Curtis, had 'lately acquired the reputation of producing the most sensible work of any official architectural office' (*AR,* January 1937, p.13)

There were also fears that without strict government controls the country would face a post-war slump, as it had in 1921.

In 1942 the Government started to prepare draft programmes of reconstruction, examining how the differing needs of housing, schools and other sectors could be coordinated and funds and resources allocated. Housing provision was clearly going to be the most pressing concern and this sector was allocated 60% of available resources when building resumed. All other sectors, including schools, would share the remaining 40%.[3]

In 1942 the Deputy Secretary of the BoE, Sir Robert Wood, began to press for official recognition of the sector's requirements, although these requirements were not entirely clear.[4] Traditional building methods would be slow and would put schools into direct competition for materials and skilled workmen with housing. The Burt Committee was already studying non-traditional building systems which might aid the housing programme and early in 1942 the Wood Committee was set up to examine school construction in the face of labour and materials shortages.

The Committee produced its first report in May 1942, favouring the use of standardized bays or a two-way grid which would lend itself to prefabricated units.[5] Its second report confirmed the finding, but gave little specific constructional advice beyond recommending that lightweight cold-rolled steel could be standardized and mass-produced and would lend itself to the grid system of planning.[6]

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[3]Nicholas Bullock, *Building the Post-War World* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.183
[4]Ibid., p.184
[5]Board of Education (The Wood Committee), *The First Report of the Committee on School Planning* (London: HMSO, 1942); Committee members included Denis Clarke Hall and Cecil Stillman.
[6]Board of Education (The Wood Committee), *Standard Construction for Schools,* Post-War Building Studies 2 (London: HMSO, 1944)

By the time the 1944 Education Act came in to force the development of non-traditional systems for school building was lagging well behind progress in housing and the Government set up the HORSA programme (Hutting Operation for the Raising of the School Leaving Age) to overcome the immediate crisis in classroom accommodation, an option taken by many local authorities.

7.2. A New School Architecture.

> The Education Act of 1945 (sic) has presented to the official architect a programme and a field of work greater than anything that he has ever had offered to him before. How will he re-act to it?
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> 'Abacus', 1946.[1]

In August 1944, the new Education Act received Royal assent. This landmark piece of legislation obliged local authorities to provide state-funded education for children up to the age of fifteen and set out a new educational framework, intended to provide all children with equal access and opportunity within the educational system, according to their abilities. The Act required that children should be instructed according to age, ability and aptitude, but did not specify the types of secondary schools required; this was set out by the newly formed Ministry of Education (MoE) which favoured the tripartite system of grammar, secondary technical and secondary modern schools, as recommended in the 1938 Spens Report.

"Abacus", writing in *OA* in 1946, questioned how the public sector architect would react to the enormous task facing him.[2] The response, he hoped, would be a jettisoning of old attitudes to produce schools 'of which we

[1] "Abacus", 'Designing the New Schools', *OA,* April 1946, p.210
[2] *OA,* April 1946, p.210

can be proud architecturally, and which will turn out scholars who have been educated in proper surroundings'.[3]

He wanted designers to move away from what had gone before and noted the ‘heaviness’ of the bulk of English architecture, nowhere 'more apparent in pre-war days than in our schools'; a totally new approach had to be adopted:[4]

> What are the new schools to be like? That rests with the architects who design them and hinges upon their outlook and mentality, I might almost say, imagination. Most of them will be official architects. They must approach this subject with an open mind; they must not be fettered by what have been referred to as the “accepted principles of school design.” They must realise that the new Act brings an entirely new attitude to school architecture, that it sets new and higher standards than any to which we have been accustomed.[5]

Architects needed to remember that they were designing for children, a 'trite and obvious' point, but one which was too often forgotten. Designers set out to impress, hiding the teaching rooms ‘behind an imposing façade of administrative units’, clearly architects were prepared to 'scorn “dickey” shirts in dress but apparently rejoice at producing them in architecture!’[6] This approach had to be abandoned because 'young children and adolescents most frequently imbibe their standards in design and building from their school and home environment'.[7]

School architecture was now clearly a pedagogic tool, not simply a means of imposing a certain regimen on pupils. Henry Morris, Secretary of Education for Cambridgeshire, and driving force behind Impington Village College, believed firmly that architecture had a vital role to play in a life-long educational process:

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[3] *OA,* April 1946, p.210
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.

> Buildings that are well-designed and equipped and beautifully decorated will exercise their potent, but unspoken, influence on those who use them from day to day. This is true education. The school, the technical college, the community centre, which is not a work of architectural art is to that extent an educational failure.[8]

Educational architecture now had a much broader responsibility than just assisting in the cultivation of health, hygiene and good manners; schools and nurseries would also form a physical setting to mould the child's understanding and appreciation of good design and aesthetics. England had architects 'capable of producing the right kind of schools', but they had to be 'persuaded to turn to official architecture'.[9] Attractive offices and better salaries would help to attract the best, as would changes in commonly used job titles; an architect in a public office should be designated as an 'Assistant Architect' rather than the demeaning 'Architectural Assistant'.

Finally, design could not be left simply to the architect, but required informed input from the public and from committees who needed to be acquainted with design and construction. 'Co-operation by all concerned is most essential, architect, committee, schoolmaster and possibly pupil'.[10]

Provision of primary schools was the initial priority for the school building programme and the co-operation which "Abacus" sought was already well under way in Hertfordshire. There the work of its newly formed architect's department, with Stirrat Johnson-Marshall heading the school's team, quickly became an exemplar of inter-disciplinary collaboration and design development.[11] It took less than three years from the creation of the architect's

[8]M K Smith, (1997, 2007) 'Viewing Impington - the idea of the village college', *the informal education homepage*, http://www.infed.org/schooling/b-vilcol.htm [Accessed 25 July 2008]
[9]*OA,* April 1946, p.210
[10]Ibid., p.210
[11]Saint (1987) provides a detailed account of the development of the Hertfordshire schools and their place within the post-war school building programme. See also R B White, *Prefabrication* (London: HMSO, 1965), pp.228-235 and Richard Llewelyn Davies and Jon Weeks, 'The Hertfordshire Achievement', *AR,* June 1952, pp.371-387

department, in 1945, to the completion and opening of their first new primary school. Within that time the whole process of school design, including structural system, measurement modules, furniture, fixtures, fittings and décor, had undergone radical reappraisal. The ideas on design development, collaboration and bulk ordering which Johnson-Marshall brought together, were not in themselves new, but the way in which they coalesced into a rolling programme of design, construction and assessment, which then informed further development, was revolutionary.

The effects of this new approach to school design, architecturally, decoratively and in terms of planning, were evident from the outset. The 'heaviness' which Abacus had noted was gone, as was the '"dickey" shirt' architecture; the buildings were light and their educational purpose was clearly visible. The all prevalent symmetry and the spreading, finger-type planning of pre-war schools had disappeared and a 'bold and extraordinarily successful use of colour' came into use.[12]

The first of the Hertfordshire schools at Cheshunt, was described by Robert Townsend as 'in many respects crude and tentative' but it clearly 'indicated all sorts of interesting possibilities'.[13] To Henry Swain, who joined the Herts team and eventually worked with Gibson at Nottingham, it was:

> something quite different. I can't impress on you too much how different these buildings looked […] here was something light and delicate and hammered out of the process of studying the problem. It was totally new, it didn't seem to have roots in anything […]. There was a total unity of architectural and technical thinking.[14]

[12]Robert Townsend, 'Towards an architecture: Post-war schools in Britain', *AR* (September 1949), p.155; Townsend worked at the Building Research Station during the war where he was responsible for experimental building; Bullock (2002), p.190
[13]Townsend, *AR,* September 1949, p.157
[14]Saint (1987), p.75

While these buildings appeared ‘totally new’ and set a benchmark for design and planning, both the building type, and the educational ethos which they encapsulated, had a defined lineage. In contrast, the large new secondary schools had few such clear antecedents. The size of the schools was virtually unprecedented and decisions about their planning and structure had to be made in response to the educational nature and ethos of the schools to be provided. In this particular area, however, education authorities faced major choices and 'considerable controversy about the best means of organising this new secondary education'.[15] Many followed the tripartite route others, such as Coventry and the LCC, decided to opt for the new comprehensive system providing all levels of teaching within one school building, and ensuring equality of opportunity rather than sorting and stigmatising children at the age of eleven.

It was accepted that schools of this new comprehensive type would have to be large in order to provide the necessary curriculum economically, but the optimum size was calculated to be around 1800 pupils, a scale of building virtually unknown in education. In 1949 Cecil Stillman summed up the problem: 'these huge comprehensive schools are as yet no more than an untried theory. Some of the problems they will pose seem, at the present time, to be almost insoluble'.[16]

For architects, public and private alike, schools on this scale raised many design issues, from the creation of manageable units and ease of circulation, to designing buildings which would retain a sense of intimacy despite their size and which would help to forge a sense of loyalty and belonging among pupils. Grouping of curricular activities had to be thought out, but designs had to remain flexible enough to allow for future growth and adaptation. Arrangements

[15]Stillman & Cleary, *The Modern School,* (London: Architectural Press, 1949), p.20
[16]Ibid., p.20

for social grouping had to be considered; some authorities favoured ‘vertical’ grouping which brought together children from all years, others chose ‘horizontal’ grouping with division of classes into lower, middle, and upper schools. The likelihood of instalment building brought additional challenges: the school had to be fully functional from the start and the later phases had to cause as little disruption and reorganization as possible.

Those authorities who chose the comprehensive system created additional problems for their architects. The idea had received little support from Attlee's Labour Government or from the 1951 Conservative Government. Coventry’s schools' architects worked in effective limbo for six years between their Council's commitment to the comprehensive system in 1947 and the Minister of Education’s agreement to it in 1953. Even then it was required that the school designs should allow for reintroduction of the tripartite system should the comprehensive experiment fail.

In addition to political and design problems architects also had to work around shortages of materials and labour and, from 1950, strict cost limitations. In 1949 the MoE gave notice that the budgets available for school building would effectively be cut by a quarter over the next three years.[17] For secondary schools this meant a reduction from an average £320 per pupil place in 1949, to a maximum £290 in 1950 and £240 in the following year. These figures would be applied across England regardless of regional cost variations.

Beyond the reports of the Wood Committee there was limited guidance for architects working on the earliest large secondary schools. Many architects took the bay system and its resulting 'finger plan' as the basis for their early designs.[18] The standardized, steel-framed, bay system had limitations; it could

[17]Ministry of Education Circular 209, Oct 1949
[18]Saint (1987), pp.57

be expanded in one direction only and the Wood Report noted that it could not be taken beyond two storeys.[19] This would hamper its use in large new secondary schools.

In 1945 architects were given, for the first time, minimum areas for the various rooms in the school and for the area of the school site, however, combining these new requirements with bay planning and light and ventilation requirements, resulted in very expensive schools, both in terms of materials and land usage.[20]

Such expense produced functional buildings, but it did not necessarily create teaching spaces which were sympathetic to the current educational ideas. Their inflexibility also restricted future adaptation in response to changes in pedagogy. Without developments in school planning and new building systems, cost reductions would most likely be achieved through reductions in the quality of materials and finishes.

Under great pressure to meet building targets, few local authorities were in a position to spare the staff to undertake development work. For many offices it was most expedient simply to repeat previous designs and details. Townsend noted in *AR* in 1949 that architects were often, 'inhibited and at times apparently paralysed by the conditions of the programme [...] and the most obvious solution is adopted and standardized forms of expression are well-nigh universal.[21]

The many conditions which impacted on design were clearly not conducive to 'fine building', nor did they sit easily with the needs of education. Townsend summed up the effects which this had on architects and architecture:

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[19]Ibid.
[20]Seaborne & Lowe (1977), p.159-160. The minimum requirements for teaching areas were reduced in 1951 and again in 1954, the largest reduction was in secondary schools
[21]Townsend, *AR,* September 1949, p.158

> Experience so far suggests that the new school building programme has outstripped architectural, material and technical facilities. The emphasis on speed encourages the architect to get plans drawn, tenders out and buildings up before there is time to think or learn. Stock solutions, together with the latest economy memorandum are apt to be regarded as a Ministry-sent aid to the beleaguered school architect. A temptation to which all too many of them seem to have succumbed. Fast and cheap are not adequate slogans where the environment for the education of children is concerned. Nevertheless, if this enormous building activity is not to exceed the economic resources of Education Authorities, it must be carried out at cut prices and as far as possible must not divert labour from other building work of an even more urgent nature. These problems are a challenge that many architects have not been able to meet, or have only solved at the cost of a sacrifice of quality in design.[22]

The scale of the school building programme also created problems for the MoE whose system of passing all school plans through three different departments, to assess the educational, architectural and materials aspects of the designs, was not fast enough or responsive enough. Reorganisation was proposed which would bring the educationalists, administrators and architects together and, in 1948, a new Architects and Building (A&B) Branch was created. Stirrat Johnson-Marshall moved from Hertfordshire to become its Chief Architect, working as joint head with administrator Anthony Part.

Initially the A&B Branch continued to assess plans, but Johnson-Marshall urged the Ministry to take a more productive and constructive role in the building programme, through their own design projects and experimentation with new systems. The proposal was met with some hostility; to the RIBA it represented a threat to the livelihood of private architects, to some county architects it threatened encroachment upon their territory.[23] Johnson-Marshall, however, achieved what he wanted and the 'Development Group' was formed, focussing purely on design development and experimentation and bringing together building system manufacturers, suppliers, educational theory and

[22]Townsend. Ibid., p.154
[23]Saint (1987), p.115

constructional research. Working under the same regulations as all school architects, the Development Group would work in collaboration with local authorities. The knowledge accrued through the projects could then inform future developments and be passed on to public and private architects alike.[24]

The introduction of the strict 'cost per place' system, in 1949, paradoxically opened up a certain amount of design freedom; as long as the cost limit was not exceeded and the minimum standards were adhered to, architects were largely free to meet the requirements as they wished. There was, however, every possibility that the financial limits might simply result in cheap structures and poor and inadequate buildings.

In order to set realistic cost limits and to establish an adequate basis for the assessment of submitted plans, the Ministry had to have a clear understanding of the exact make-up of building costs. Architects tended to take a rather perfunctory attitude towards costings and the existing, rather simplistic, methods of calculation provided no accurate basis for analysis or comparison between schools.

In the interests of the school building programme, and for the benefit of the wider profession, costing and estimating clearly had to become an integral part of the design and decision making process. If stringent reductions in costs were to be achieved without a reduction in building quality, then the Ministry had to provide architects with the facts and figures to assist them.

To achieve this Johnson-Marshall brought a quantity surveyor into the A&B Branch to produce element by element cost analyses for previously executed designs.[25] His careful dissection of the figures gradually revealed exactly where, and how, school building budgets had been spent and provided

[24]Ibid., p.115
[25]Saint (1987), p.119

the crucial information which would allow architects to make informed design decisions. Usage of space within school buildings was also analysed, highlighting areas where cost savings could be made. Circulation space was an obvious candidate for reappraisal, and designing dual purpose, rather than single purpose rooms provided another potential area for savings.[26]

Townsend, in his review of school architecture, sought to identify design trends, and noted a fundamental problem for the architectural critic:

> In estimating [...] current design trends it is necessary to distinguish the trees from the wood. The architectural landscape is formed both by the jungle of the average and the focal point of the specimen tree. The latter may well exert a powerful long term influence, but it is the former that goes to make up our environment. It has indeed been argued that the average should attract the chief attention since it more accurately reflect the conditions and achievements of the day.[27]

Nevertheless, for the purposes of architectural criticism only the best buildings were 'adequate and worthy of detailed consideration'. This highlighted a fundamental problem for public sector architects: in terms of school building, the 'jungle of the average' was, in terms of volume, going to be the work of official departments, the 'specimen trees' would most likely be the work of private architects. Could the public sector produce architecture worthy of equal critical consideration?

In June 1953, the annual RIBA Conference met to consider the school building programme.[28] In a wide ranging discussion speakers from all sectors of the architectural profession examined the problems, dilemmas and successes of the school building programme.

The President of the RIBA, Howard Robertson, opened the proceedings and questioned both the quality of public sector design and the profession's

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[26]The findings of these two very novel approaches to building analysis were published in the Ministry's Building Bulletins series, 1951.
[27]Townsend (1949), p.154
[28]*OAP,* July 1953, pp.331-344. The journal viewed the conference as 'one of the most important…of its kind held for many years'.

growing reliance on industrialised building. For the public sector it was yet another, albeit polite, reminder from the top of the profession that the perceived hierarchy of the sectors was still extant. Robertson believed 'flourishing private practice' to be 'the best background for ensuring high quality in officially sponsored and executed work'.[29] The profession had to remember that architecture was 'a visual art, and by our success as artists will we finally be judged'. He believed that every 'illiterate or ill-mannered building' was 'driving a nail into the architectural coffin' and he knew where the blame lay, 'ever since science has begun to outstrip expression the supply of such nails has been all too plentiful'. Architects needed to pause and consider whether they were 'using the rudder or [...] merely drifting in the wake of science and engineering'.[30]

Stirrat Johnson-Marshall countered the attack, highlighting the fact that in six 'difficult and exciting' years, 1500 schools had been built, and architects had achieved a 45% reduction in average school building costs while maintaining building quality.[31] The Ministry had encouraged them to 'strive after the right balance between quality and economy', and architects had met that challenge.[32]

Richard Sheppard examined design developments in school architecture and the aesthetic dilemma facing architects. He said that generally, 'pre-Butler era' schools had been dictated by principles which had 'no particular relation to school building'. Nevertheless, the resulting schools had possessed 'very definite individuality and character', albeit that their functional purpose as schools may not have been obvious. Now architects had successfully developed 'a building type which can be identified as a school and nothing else'

[29]Ibid., p.331
[30]*OAP,* July 1953, p.331
[31]Ibid., p.331
[32]Even coat-hook design received Johnson-Marshall's attention; Douglas Chalk interview with the author

but, in that achievement, individuality and character had suffered, 'I doubt if we should know Hertfordshire from Derbyshire today, and a child moving from one to the other would probably see no difference'.[33]

C H Aslin considered the growth of the official sector and saw the commissioning of private architects for public work as 'essential to keep the whole profession on an even keel.'[34] He also made a plea for a 'new method of working' to be brought into common use: group working. The system which had proved so successful in Coventry for nearly fifteen years still, clearly, had to be explained and promoted.[35]

Sidney Loweth, Kent County Architect, elaborated on the advantages of distributing work to the private sector, but F R S Yorke, while admitting that 'working for a public authority' was 'on the whole rather less arduous than working for a private client', pointed out the problems faced by the private sector.[36] Workflow and staffing were areas of difficulty and he spoke of the difficulties faced by the architect with a small office or trying to set up a new business; he felt that the RIBA should give some thought to allowing architects to form companies.[37]

Despite the claims of the speakers, all of whom suggested a degree of harmony between the sectors, one member of the audience felt that 'sweet reasonableness did not prevail in all parts of the country between official and private architects.'[38] Another speaker concurred and pointed out the antagonism which affected RIBA Council elections.'[39] In his summing up Stirrat Johnson-Marshall said that 'the question of the relationship between the private

[33] *OAP,* July 1953, p.333
[34] Ibid., p.337
[35] Ibid., p.337
[36] *OAP,* June 1953, p.341
[37] Ibid., p.343
[38] Ibid., p.343
[39] Ibid., p.344

and official architect represented a really serious job to be done; it was the key problem of our time.'[40]

Howard Robertson had questioned the quality of school design in his opening speech at the Conference and his concerns seem to have been well founded. In 1956 an article entitled 'Planning the Comprehensive school' appeared in *Architectural Design*.[41] Written by a Ministry of Education architect and a Local Authority Chief Inspector, the verdict on design up to that point was fairly damning. The earliest post-war schools, they felt, reflected 'little appreciation of the problem of size in their large monolithic classroom blocks with long corridors, the massed gymnasia, extended lavatories and cloakrooms. The general impression is one of anonymity overawing in its vast architectural scale.'

Looking at the new comprehensives built to that date, the tendency appears to have been either towards vast horizontal scale, such as the country's first comprehensive, Kidbrooke Grove, London, 1954 (see Figure 54), or vast vertical scale, for example the monolithic Tulse Hill, a nine-storey slab block opened in 1956 (see Figure 55).[42] Finding a middle ground was not easy. Powell and Moya's Mayfield School, Putney, 1953, was an essay in using design to reduce the apparent size of a building, but suffered problems with circulation and lack of amenities for social groupings[43].

Spence, however, managed to find a middle ground in his design for Sydenham Comprehensive, London. The plans had been on the drawing board in his Queen Anne Street office as Robertson made his plea for architecture as a 'visual art', and construction was nearing completion when the damning report

[40]Ibid., p.344
[41]*AD,* April 1956, p.110
[42]*AJ,* 13 March 1952, pp.334-336. Kidbrooke Grove Comprehensive, Blackheath, London. Designed by Slater Moberly Pike and Uren; *Prefabrication,* December 1956, pp.57-61 Tulse Hill School, London, designed by J.L.Martin.
[43]*A&BN,* 15 March 1956, pp.251-336; Seaborne & Lowe (1977), p.192

on the design of comprehensive schools appeared in *Architectural Design.* The design of Sydenham School will now be considered in more detail as an exception to the early tendencies.

7.3. Spence: Sydenham Girls Comprehensive School, Dartmouth Road, Sydenham, London. 1956

> The true order of learning should be, first, what is necessary; second, what is useful; third, what is ornamental – to reverse this arrangement is like beginning to build at the top of the edifice.
>
> Lydia Huntley Sigourney.[1]

Howard Robertson, President of the RIBA, had spoken at the 1953 RIBA Conference of every 'illiterate or ill-mannered building […] driving a nail into the architectural coffin'.[2] Richard Sheppard had highlighted the loss of individuality and character from school buildings.[3] The potential for architecture to take this path had, to an extent, been foreseen in an RIBA Report in 1946 which asked that architects should keep in mind their wider architectural duty:

> Building for new needs is important, and is recognized, but it is not the whole duty of architecture, even in a period of far-reaching change. Architecture includes the expression of permanence [...] Apart from its aesthetic value, fine building gives a sense of continuity to a people – what might be called a time dimension – and it is doubtful whether a nation can have a true sense of its future and of its obligation to posterity unless it also has a true sense of its past. The durability of fine building remains a chief means of expressing these fundamental things.[4]

[1]Lydia Huntley Sigourney (1791-1865), *The New Dictionary of Thoughts* (London: Waverley Book Co., 1936)
[2]*OAP,* July 1953, p.331
[3]Ibid., p.333
[4]RIBA Committee (Chairman Edward Maufe), *The Architectural Use of Building Materials*, Post-war Building Studies 18 (London: HMSO, 1946), p.7

For Spence, art, architecture and the creation of a bridge between the past and the future, were indivisible, any other approach was anathema to him. He prefaced his book on Coventry Cathedral with a quote from Bela Bartok:

> Only a fool will build in defiance of the past. What is new and significant always must be grafted to old roots, the truly vital roots that are chosen with great care from the ones that merely survive. ... that is the only way to achieve progress instead of disaster.[5]

Sydenham Girls' Comprehensive School answered Howard Robertson's plea for 'visual art'. It was not overtly science driven, certainly not 'illiterate or ill-mannered', nor lacking in ‘individuality and character’. Designed to provide an additional 1,140 places for the existing school, while retaining as much open space as possible, the building avoided ‘overawing’ anonymity, providing a pleasing solution to the problems of scale and aesthetics.[6] Its command of the site’s topography, the interplay of materials and the modulation of the facades resulted in an elegant, literate individuality and a strong character which embodied Spence's architectural ethos.

7.3a. Development of the design.

> In September we shall mark the Jubilee […] of the inception of this second phase in [the school’s] history, which forms, as it were, the strong trunk of the tree of the school. [...] And now, because the London County Council has decided to implement the 1944 Education Act by the establishment of comprehensive schools, that tree must prepare to send forth many branches to embrace spheres of work as yet unknown to us.
>
> Miss E M Kimsey, 1955.[1]

The Headmistress’s foreword to the Sydenham School Magazine, 1955, registered some apprehension about the changes facing her school. From

[5]Spence (1962)
[6]*AD,* April 1956, p.110
[1]E M Kimsey, ‘Foreword’, *Sydenham School Magazine* Summer term 1955.

1947, she had rebuilt a stable and successful school, but now had to oversee huge changes as a highly controversial educational system was implemented and the pupil intake more than doubled.

Her approach was simply to absorb the larger school, and its broadened pupil base, into the existing grammar school ethos.[2] 'Aim High' had been the school motto since 1905 and continued to be so. Girls at Sydenham were educated for careers and had notable success in gaining university scholarships. Extra-curricular clubs learned about radiography, watched demonstrations of glass blowing and listened to talks on Russia and the Middle East. Sydenham was a school with roots, traditions and expectations, and while it is most unlikely that Miss Kimsey had any input into the design process, there seems to have been much common ground between her educational approach and Spence's architectural approach. Her description of the school as a tree sending out branches was a metaphor which Spence himself frequently used when talking about architecture.[3]

The new school building, which opened in September 1956, complemented perfectly the educational heritage Sydenham represented and the future it was aiming for. An appreciation of this blend of past and present was noted at the official opening ceremony:

> “For life to be great and full, it must embrace the past and the future.” The truth of these words of Anatole France was emphasised by successive speakers ... as our school assumed its “full stature” ... Speaking of the great traditions upon which our school is founded, the Chairman referred to the superb results which the architect's long-laid plans now revealed to us.[4]

[2]This approach can clearly be seen in subsequent issues of the school magazine.
[3]At a public lecture at the University of Leeds in April 1956, Spence said 'tradition is like a tree which has its roots deep on the soil from which it gets its strength, and this supplies the life which keeps the leaves green and throws out fresh branches and fresh leaves which in turn absorb the rays of the sun'. Quoted by Clive Fenton in 'Basil Spence: Theory and Philosophy' 2006, unpublished essay AHRC Spence Project archive.
[4]Janet Ramsden, Official Opening Ceremony, *Sydenham School Magazine,* Summer 1957.

The creation of the new comprehensive involved amalgamating the existing girls' grammar with nearby Shackleton School. The existing grammar school accommodation (see Figure 56), a red-brick, courtyard building dating from 1917, was to remain and the site would be enlarged by demolishing houses on the south of the site.

The project began with a detailed schedule of accommodation from the client and a conté crayon sketch plan by Andrew Renton.[5] The school was then divided into sections which were distributed amongst members of the office. Preliminary designs for each were produced to different grid measurements and in different materials.[6] Published details of the project note that varied methods of construction were employed in order to meet the Ministry of Education cost limits.[7] Despite this initially fragmented approach, the final design achieved a feeling of unity and integration and, while the drawings show a gradual refinement of the building's articulation and many changes to internal layout, the basic footprint of the building and the ordering of its parts remained consistent from the draft scheme, dated June 1952, to construction (see Figures 57 and 58).[8]

The site, measuring less than seven acres, was very restricted, and the aim was to retain as much open ground as possible.[9] While some architects were experimenting with 'double-banking' classes around corridors in order to save space, this decision was not taken at Sydenham.[10] Instead, the majority of

[5]RCAHMS SPE ENG/5/2/1/2 Undated schedule of accommodation; David Rock interview with the author 9 January 2008
[6]David Rock, interview 9 January 2008. Those working on the scheme included Edward Samuel, formerly an architect with the Ministry of Education and Norman Westwater.
[7]*AJ,* 12 September 1957, p.410
[8]RCAHMS SPE ENG/5/2/1/3 Draft Scheme June 1952
[9]Coventry at this time was planning schools of 1650 places, on sites of over 50 acres. The Woodlands School had a 52 acre site; Spence was successful in preserving the natural surroundings of the school; in the *Sydenham School Magazine* 1957, the Headmistress referred to 'our new building, surrounded by pleasant lawns in which trees of long growth have been preserved'
[10]'Double-banking' put classrooms along both sides of the corridor which caused difficulties in attaining the necessary levels of daylighting; Powell & Moya, Mayfield Comprehensive, London.

the classrooms were placed in a linear, six-storey block; each floor effectively planned on the traditional finger-type layout with a line of classes to the south and a long corridor to the north (see Figure 59).[11]

Over the eastern half of the site a fall of twenty-two feet from west to east had to be accommodated in the design of the main south-facing teaching block. From the first it was decided not to step this block down the sloping site, but to raise its eastern end on a plinth and then further raise the whole block on pilotis, simplifying the structure and minimizing the distances between all parts of the school (see Figure 60).[12]

From this main spine, three rectangular six-storey blocks projected to the north. Published reports refer to these as the 'annexes' or 'pavilions'. The lowest storey of each annexe abutted the plinth, their roofs level with the fifth floor of the main block. Each floor comprised a single classroom, accessed from the main corridor. Spence had already produced a similar plan for the main block at Duncanrig School, but with classroom blocks projecting to north and south (see Figure 62).[13]

At Sydenham the west end of the main spine block adjoined a north-south administration wing, which in turn joined the east end of the dining room and hall block. From this point there was a variation in plan line with the north wall of the administration wing angled slightly north-west. The south wall of the dining-room followed this line, running parallel to the distinctive auditorium

A&BN, 15 March 1956, pp.251-336.

[11]Spence proposed an eight-storey class block for Duncanrig Secondary School, in East Kilbride. The executed design was only three-storeys and no other Spence schools exceeded this. RCAHMS DP020488 Duncanrig School, drawing signed by Spence, 1951.

[12]A very similar approach was taken by Sir John Burnet, Tait and Partners at Aireborough Rawdon Benton Park Secondary School, West Riding CC. The model, pictured in *OAP,* July 1957, p.335, shows a four storey block raised on pilotis and a battered plinth to accommodate a drop in ground levels.

[13]*A&BN,* 25 October 1951, p.449. Other architects were also turning to linear classroom blocks with projecting annexes; David Stokes' Cardinal Griffin School, Lansbury, 1953, utilised the projecting blocks for teaching space (*AR,* March 1953, pp.173-175). Others, such as Lyons, Israel and Ellis' junior school at Southampton, 1953, tended to use the blocks purely for vertical circulation (*AR,* December 1953, pp.368-371)

shape of the hall (see Figure 57).[14] The kitchen projected at right angles to this line and from the west end of this group the gymnasia projected northwards, returning to the same plan line as the main blocks. [15]

Between June and September a clear separation between the classroom block and the administration wing was established with a two storey glazed bridge linking the two buildings. Further refinements included a small balcony to one of the housecraft rooms and a glass screen which zig-zagged through the southern pilotis.[16]

Private architects tended to employ recurring design motifs which lent both a stamp of individuality and a mark of authorship to their schools.[17] The Spence motif - tapered blocks - appears in the Sydenham drawings in September 1952 (see Figure 61).[18] This detail was used at Duncanrig School, East Kilbride (see Figure 62), and in a more pronounced fashion at Colley Secondary Modern, Sheffield. [19] At Sydenham the tapering was applied to the annexe blocks.[20] While Spence appears to have left the design very much to his assistant architects, he kept a very close eye on the process and although the decision to taper the blocks cannot be ascribed to him with absolute certainty, the feature appears on early plans of Duncanrig, drawn and signed by him.[21] It is, therefore, probable that he suggested the modification.

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[14]Kilsyth School, *RIBAJ,* October 1948, pp.524-5; *RIBAJ,* June 1953, p.316 - At the 1953 British Architects' Conference, Richard Sheppard pointed to a change in design of assembly halls and the breaking down of the auditorium concept, dominant in earlier halls, to produce more flexible and multi-purpose spaces. Sydenham lies midway between these approaches having a very traditional auditorium form, but the flexibility of making the stage into a smaller hall, and joining the main hall and foyer spaces.
[15]RCAHMS SPE ENG/5/2/1/3 June 1952; David Rock recalls that at this time most projects in the office included a 15 degree 'kick on plan' - interview with the author 09/01/08.
[16]RCAHMS SPE ENG/5/2/2/3 25/8/52
[17]Distinctive treatment of water towers is one particular motif of Yorke, Rosenberg and Mardall.
[18]RCAHMS SPE ENG/5/2/2/6 Dated 4 Sept 1952.
[19]RCAHMS Digital reference nos: 020486, 020487, 020490. Dated March 1951, signed by Basil Spence. *A&BN* (25 October 1951), p.449; *AJ,* 24 March 1955, p.401
[20]RCAHMS SPE ENG/5/2/2/6 Dated 4 Sept 1952
[21]Spence's signature does not appear on any Sydenham drawings, but he would check over work in progress at night and leave notes suggesting alterations or alternatives: David Rock interview; RCAHMS. SGF 1950/3/1 – DP020486 Duncanrig plans March 1951.

Unlike Duncanrig the taper was not applied to the whole block. In plan the southern end of each annexe remained rectangular, projecting a short distance beyond the stair and toilet areas. North of this was the wider, main body of the annexe, trapezoidal in shape and tapering to the north. This modification brought a clear external articulation to the internal components and marked the maturing of the design and the full development of the feature tentatively used in the Duncanrig and Sheffield schemes.

By November 1952 the final, significant, refinements of the plan had been decided (see Figure 63): the angling of the main foyer and kitchen was abandoned and, on the main classroom block, a robust six-bay box-balcony replaced the earlier proposal, providing an open balcony for one of the model flats, extra enclosed space for the housecraft room and a roof terrace from which meteorological measurements could be taken (see Figure 60).[22]

It has to be noted that although the grammar school's 'house' system continued to operate within the new school, its presence is not evident at any point either in the design process or in the final building. There is no discussion of 'house' facilities in the documentation, nor any indication of common rooms or house masters' rooms on the plans which might indicate separate 'house' groups. This is in stark contrast to the approach taken in Coventry, where the individual house block, each with its own facilities, formed the fundamental unit of the planning process, governing the composition and layout of all new comprehensive schools in the city (see pages.280-2).[23]

[22] *AJ,* 12 September 1957, p.399
[23] Schools include Caludon Castle, The Woodlands and Lyng Hall.

7.3b. Project completion.

Although not fully completed, the school opened in September 1956.[1] The Headmistress's report for the School Magazine, summer 1957, gives an indication of the initial difficulties:

> As I look out from my very sunny room on to the whole expanse of our new building, [...] the problems which faced us only nine months ago seem such a very long way away.
>
> The difficulty of getting a peaceful hour in which to hold the Morning Service on the first day – conducted from the gymnasia balcony strewn with planks and rubble; the subsequent separation for half a term of Middle and Upper School into six sections for Daily Prayers; the picnic meals in form rooms which also served as cloakrooms; the long trek back and fro to the Junior School before our present link existed, [...] gradually gave way to the present orderly routine which now seems always to have existed from the beginning.[2]

By the time the school appeared in the architectural press, these initial problems had been overcome and the photographs show how well the new building had fitted into its surroundings. As the architect's press release in February 1957 stated, 'character and interest are achieved by a frank statement of structure both externally and internally and the use of natural material such as stone, brick and timber, which will mature and maintain a permanent effect.[3] That maturity was visible from the first as the quality of the landscaping, the retention of mature trees and the use of natural materials, worked together to ensure that the rawness inherent in most new buildings was avoided.

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[1]Working drawings completed November 1953, contract signed March 1954, *AJ,* 12 September 1957, p.408. David Rock was now doing his National Service and the architect on site was Michael Hopkins: David Rock interview 9/1/08.

[2]*Sydenham School Magazine* Summer 1957. http://www.sydenham.lewisham.sch.uk/07friends/pdf_history/1957%20Summer%20Magazine.pdf. Foreword Miss Kimsey Headmistress; One former pupil recalled 'I have memories of all the disruption caused by the building, of the multi-coloured concrete end which was washed out by rain even before the opening ceremony, of braving waterfalls between the teaching block and the Hall for assembly, and similar teething troubles', *Friends of Sydenham School Newsletter* Issue 30 Jan 2004. Norma Ham, pupil 1955-62.
http://www.sydenham.lewisham.sch.uk/07friends/pdf_newsletters/30_friends_newsletter_jan_04.pdf

[3]RCAHMS. MS 2329/ENG/5/1/14 Press release, February 1957

The main class block was visually linked with the administration wing, through the employment of the same design module and fenestration (see Figure 64). Their separate functions were reflected in the use of different materials in the spandrel panels; concrete with exposed aggregate and lemon yellow panels for the class block and panels of red facing bricks for the administration wing.

Derbydene stone was used to face the reinforced concrete gable end walls of the main block, which rose above a 2 ft thick concrete raft, supported on *in situ* tapered pilotis, above a battered plinth of granite setts (see Figure 60). Pre-cast concrete columns formed the structural grid of the south elevation and the intention was to set the galvanised steel windows and spandrel walls between these columns, over the five floors. With the main frame already erected on site, and manufacture of the pre-cast mullions complete, the LCC Education Department suddenly asked for an extra classroom on each of the lower floors.[4] The resulting reduction in room size, from 3 bays to 2⅔ bays, was achieved by divorcing the junctions of the internal partitions from the external grid by setting the facade back behind the columns and altering the fenestration (see Figure 65).

This alteration fulfilled the client's needs, and added greatly to the character of the building, while helping to reduce its apparent mass. Viewed from Cheseman Street, it created a sense of recession from the projecting box balcony, down through the recessed facade of the first two floors, to the tapering pilotis. At this lowest level, the use of glass screens set back from the facade, enclosing the lifts and stairs, reinforced this impression.[5]

[4] *AR,* September 1957, p.163
[5] Sadly this sense of recession was lost with the enclosure of the lower area in 1994, to create a 6th form area: www.sydenham.lewisham.sch.uk/07friends/index/htm History link p.7

The annexe blocks (see Figure 66) were of similar construction to the main block, with concrete spandrels of the same exposed aggregate and the lower retaining walls faced with granite setts as a continuation of the main plinth. The rooms were lit by clerestory windows on the west and windows on the east matching those of the main southern elevation. On the north elevation of the main block, T-shaped metal mullions fixed to the edges of the floor slabs held metal window sections. On every floor the lower sections of these were filled with rough-cast glass, behind which painted cement render on breeze block spandrel walls showed as coloured panels.[6]

Internally, the lowest floors of the central and eastern annexe blocks provided cloakroom space. Stairs from these led up to the screened area below the main body of the building and from here two passenger lifts and further stairs led up to the ground floor of the main block. General class rooms on this floor had access via the link bridge to the library and music rooms in the administration block. Further general teaching rooms occupied the first floor, but here eight of the rooms were arranged in pairs, with folding partitions allowing four larger rooms to be created if necessary. The link bridge again provided access to the administration block. The upper three floors housed the specialist teaching rooms.

Throughout the school the decoration was in cool, neutral tints; light and medium greys for most walls and white for ceilings. Fabrics and wall papers provided focal points of colourful contrast, together with the occasional lemon-yellow door or mottled dark red floors.[7]

The separation of the main block from the administration block worked well on plan, but proposals to landscape the area between, as an approach to

[6] *AJ,* 12 September 1957, p.401
[7] RCAHMS. MS 2329/ENG/5/1/14 Press release, February 1957

the main entrance, did not materialise. Instead the flue leader from the boiler room, together with the 70 ft high hexagonal flue, partially blocked this approach (see Figure 64). A bench fixed to the south side of the flue leader appeared to be an afterthought to utilise the expanse of brick wall, rather than expressing the clear integration of structure, landscape and function usual in Spence projects. Sadly, the sense of clear spatial division between the buildings and the importance of the area as an entrance route were lost, as was the visual elegance of the link bridge with its slender, central, supporting column.

The retention of the Dartmouth Road entrance to the site, and the layout of the new blocks, placed the main public entrance to the new buildings deep within the complex. Visitors were therefore drawn into the school, rather than being kept on its periphery, and approached the main entrance and foyer up a long inclined path to the north of the main teaching block.[8]

At the 1952 RIBA Conference, Sheppard had pointed to the 'decline of that traditional feature the ceremonial entrance'; it was, he noted, something which had 'almost disappeared' from school planning.[9] Such entrances no longer marked the main axis of the hall, but led instead into the foyer, their 'height and importance in formal terms have disappeared'. This was true of the entrance design at Sydenham where the entrance was set into the side of the foyer rather than the front elevation. Nevertheless, the whole approach managed to retain a very traditional ceremonial feel, in keeping with the school's former grammar school status.

The double height, glass fronted entrance foyer (see Figure 67) was raised up on three slender hexagonal columns above a landscaped pool, a

[8]This wide path also acted as a vehicular access to enable fire fighters to reach the annexe blocks. *AJ*, 12 September 1957, p.408
[9]*RIBAJ,* June 1953, p.318

wide flight of steps on its north side leading up to the main doors.[10] A large horizontal canopy over the entrance pierced the wall and projected into the foyer where it formed one end of a mezzanine bridge; this elegant interconnection of structure and space was visible through the glazed wall. Although the entrance itself lacked the imposing architectural treatment found in more traditional designs, the approach, reminiscent of a sweeping perron staircase, together with the canopy over the main doors and the glazed elevation of the foyer, all worked together to create a sense of height, importance and ceremony.

Once inside the entrance hall, steps to the right, led up to a larger dining-foyer and the assembly hall. A wide cantilevered staircase led from these steps, up over a glass screened reception to the first floor of the administration block, giving access to the head and deputy's offices and to a mezzanine bridge which linked this floor directly to the gallery at the rear of the main hall (sees Figure 68).

Spence's concern for interior decoration was very apparent and the decoration and materials used in the foyer gave the space an impressive, but not elitist, feel. The fully glazed external doors were framed in meranti hardwood and, beneath the polished Derbydene stone floor, under-floor heating ensured that heater units did not mar the clean lines of the space. The red brick walls were pointed with red mortar and the west wall, around the entrance to the dining foyer and hall, was papered with an imposing pattern from the 'Palladio' range, designed by Guy Irwin.[11]

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[10]David Rock wanted a pool in this location. Spence suggested that it should be a 'biology tank' as the educational value of the latter was likely to be more acceptable to the client than the luxury of the former. Rock interview 9 January 2008

[11]These wallpapers, specifically targeted at architects and intended for public spaces, were specially commissioned and hand screen-printed rather than machine produced: Lesley Jackson *Twentieth Century Pattern Design: Textile and wallpaper pioneers* (London: Mitchell Beazley, 2002), pp.106-108

The single-storey dining foyer to the north of the assembly hall was separated from it by folding screens which allowed the spaces to be used jointly or individually. The south side of the foyer was fully glazed and opened onto a dining terrace. Within the main hall the raked gallery was faced with Meranti tongue and groove boards and surmounted by a brass rail. Wood block was used for the hall floor and the walls were painted grey-green. The *AJ* found the general character of the hall to be 'one of glowing richness, dominated by warm coloured wood'.[12] The stage, at the west end of the hall, could be separated from the main room by a folding screen to form a smaller hall, providing some flexibility in utilising the spaces. The smaller hall also served as circulation space for the gymnasia.

The three gymnasia were again steel framed and load-bearing brickwork supported a mezzanine level along the eastern side, which housed changing and shower rooms and provided a viewing balcony with stores and staff changing rooms beneath. Externally this mezzanine level was jettied out and supported on slender octagonal concrete columns to create a covered walkway or play area.

The final section of the new complex comprised the single storey kitchen area which projected to the south of the main dining foyer, creating a sheltered dining terrace. The construction was partly steel and partly load-bearing brick. The windows of the kitchen mirrored the fenestration of the administration and teaching blocks, and lime green spandrel panels gave this area a very fresh appearance. As with the rest of the site, the existing mature trees were preserved. The *AJ* made special mention of the tree nearest the dining terrace

[12] *AJ,* 12 September 1957, p.406

which had been saved even though the terrace was 5 feet above the original ground level (see Figure 69).[13]

The final cost of the building, as published in 1957, was slightly over £325,000, equivalent to a net cost per place of £249 10s, which was just within the Ministry of Education's cost limit.[14] As the *AJ* pointed out, however, the area per pupil place achieved at Sydenham was 82.29 square feet, far greater than comparable schools.[15] This meant that proportionally the overall cost per foot square at Sydenham was considerably less; 60s 7¾d as opposed to Catford at 80s 7d per sq. ft.:

> In order to plan down to this figure economies have obviously been made in designing work of a repetitive nature and in the choice of a mixture of techniques and perhaps to the use of a number of wet trades; unless the client required the accommodation to be completed in a certain order this latter choice may have some bearing on the contract period, which extended over 2½ years.[16]

Within these economies however, an elegant and robust building emerged and, as was hoped, the natural materials used in the design did, over time, 'mature and maintain a permanent effect'.[17]

[13]*AJ,* 12 September 1957, p.403
[14]Ibid., p.410; A report in *A&BN,* 24 September 1958, put the estimated costs at £351,000 and the net cost per place at just under £253.
[15]*AJ,* 12 September 1957, p.410; Woodlands School, Coventry provided 72.3 sq.ft. per pupil (*AJ,* 13 October 1955, p.502) Mayfield School, Putney 67 sq.ft. (*A&BN,* March 1956), Holland Park, 76.1 sq.ft.(*AD,* April 1956, p.120)
[16]*AJ,* 12 September 1957, p.410. A two and a half year contract for a school of this size was very slow
[17]RCAHMS. MS 2329/ENG/5/1/14 Press release, February 1957

7.4. Gibson: From Coventry to CLASP: The development of a building system.

> Here then lies Opportunity. Given diligence,
> enterprise and patience who can set bounds
> to what may yet be achieved.
>
> City of Coventry Education Committee 1955.[1]

In 1926, as a response to the recommendations of the Hadow Report on *The Education of the Adolescent*, Coventry prepared a five-year programme to remodel or replace its school buildings in order to remove all-age schools and reduce class sizes.[2] The rapid growth of the city's population, however, combined with the economic downturn of the early 1930s, ensured that the programme was not met.[3] By 1938 only half of Coventry's schools had been reorganised and a survey, which included these premises, recorded overcrowding and/or unsatisfactory facilities at all but four schools in the city.[4]

By 1942 conditions had worsened considerably. Utilisation of schools for air-raid shelters and services accommodation had removed over 4,000 school places and an additional 4,187 places had been lost because of bomb damage.[5]

As the war ended the workload on Gibson's department intensified; in addition to planning the city centre reconstruction, dealing with a housing crisis and an acute schools shortage, his architects had responsibility for a myriad other projects, from shops, libraries, and health centres, to police stations, civic restaurants, and public toilets. The volume of work meant that Gibson had to

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[1] City of Coventry Education Authority, *Official Opening of The Woodlands Comprehensive Secondary School for Boys, 12th October 1955* (Coventry 1955)
[2] Geoffrey Firth, *Comprehensive Schools in Coventry and Elsewhere*, (Coventry: City of Coventry, 1963), p.10
[3] Between 1927 and 1932 extensions to the City boundary added 4,048 pupils to the school population (Ibid., p.11). Coventry's population as a whole grew from 69,877 in 1901 to over 220,000 in 1939 (Richardson (1972), p.182 and Tiratsoo (1990), Table A, p.120)
[4] Firth (1963), p.10
[5] Firth (1963), p.11

step back from the personal interest he had taken in individual projects and hand over large areas of responsibility to his architects. The group working system now came into its own; his architects took charge of large and complex projects and he had the confidence in his team to allow them to work without interference. The responsibility they were given and their involvement in every aspect of a project created an environment which a former Coventry architect described as 'a pleasant and lively place in which to work.'[6]

School building recommenced in the city in 1949 and thirty-three new schools, mostly primary, were opened over the next six years. When Gibson left in 1955, the first three of Coventry's new comprehensive schools had opened and between 1955 and 1960 a further thirty-one schools were completed.[7]

Gibson placed some school contracts with private architects: Richard Sheppard & Robson, A M Gear, Edric Neal and Rodney Thomas, and the Architects' Co-Partnership were among those who produced schools for the authority.[8] Gibson's friendship with Stirrat Johnson-Marshall resulted in three collaborative ventures with the MoE Development Group, but the majority of the school building programme was carried out by the City Architect's department.[9]

Gibson left his schools architects 'to their own devices' and admitted that he 'never took much notice' of what his chief schools' architect was doing.[10] There are, therefore, no schools which can be cited as examples of his direct design input, instead the great variety of materials, structural systems, styles

[6] Douglas Chalk correspondence with the author 31 January 2006
[7] Firth (1963), p.132
[8] Sheppard & Robson: Whitmore Park Primary School (*AR*, November 1951, p.318); Gear, Neal and Thomas: Alderman's Green Primary School (*AR*, January 1954, p.264); Architects' Co-Partnership, Richard Lee School, Wyken (*AR*, January 1954, p.198)
[9] MoE collaborations on Limbrick Wood Primary School, Woodlands Boys' Comprehensive and Lyng Hall Girls' Comprehensive are discussed in Saint (1987).
[10] British Library Sound Archive (BLSA) C447/11/01-02: Gibson interviewed by Andrew Saint, March 1984

and planning employed in Coventry's post-war schools, stand as testament to Gibson's technological and developmental ethos.

Perhaps his greatest contribution to school building began as a housing project which was reported in the *Coventry Evening Telegraph,* in October 1944, as a 'Coventry experiment with labour-saving houses'.[11] While the article mentioned the 'host of attractive features and refinements' inside the all-electric houses in Mitchell Avenue, it did not mention their unique cold-rolled steel frame construction and the fact that they represented the first constructional use of this material in the country.[12]

The houses, part of Gibson's on-going research into new building systems which might help to solve Coventry's housing crisis, formed part of an experimental centre which had developed in the Canley area of the city.[13] Designed by Grey Wornum and Richard Sheppard, they were the first example of the 'Keyhouse Unibuilt' system (see Figures 70 and 71). Based on a light-gauge steel-frame, the houses were the product of collaboration between Gyproc Ltd, J Sankey & Sons and J Brockhouse & Co, specialists in castings and drop-forgings.[14] The structural system had been developed by Brockhouse's designer F W Lister Heathcote, a mechanical, rather than structural, engineer, with expertise in sprung frames for motor engines.[15]

Heathcote was an engineering graduate from Manchester University and had studied under Gibson's father. He found his mentor's son possessed an easy grasp of technology and the work between the two men on the Unibuilt house eventually developed into a long and fruitful collaboration.

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[11] *CET*, 30 October 1944
[12] The houses are discussed in Shaw (1993), pp.50-55 and Saint (1987), pp.157-161
[13] Gibson's experimental housing work is examined in Shaw (1993)
[14] F R S Yorke, *The Modern House*, 4th edition (London: Architectural Press, 1944), pp.218-19; 'Unibuilt demonstration houses', *AJ*, 22 June 1944, pp.471-74. Wornum designed the RIBA's headquarters in Portland Place, London. Sheppard went on to specialise in school and college design.
[15] Saint (1987), p.157 & 166

Brockhouse had started to investigate the constructional use of cold-rolled steel in 1942. Although it lacked the strength of its hot-rolled counterpart it used less steel, resulting in material savings of around forty percent. It was hoped that its use in a light-weight structural system would play an important role in post-war housing provision.

Heathcote's frame used two standard sizes of steel section welded together in the factory. Two men could easily handle each unit and the frames automatically levelled themselves as they were bolted to the foundation slabs (see Figure 73). Plasterboard was used internally to line the walls and externally asbestos-cement pans clipped on to the frame and could hold a variety of facing materials. The prefabricated nature of the frame and its ease of handling meant that main structure of the Mitchell Avenue houses, including cladding and roofing, took only a little over two weeks to erect.[16]

Despite the material savings, the system proved costly to produce when compared to hot-rolled steel. A trial by the BISF eventually led to the further development of a hot-rolled system and Heathcote's cold-rolled frame seemed destined to go no further.[17]

When the war ended, William Glare, Gibson's chief schools' architect, found himself heading a very large schools' programme. Temporary accommodation was provided in huts and refurbished wartime hostels while Glare's team focussed on the immediate priority of new primary schools. Although they also began designing secondary schools, these formed part of the later building programme.[18]

[16]Yorke (1944), p.219
[17] Saint (1987), p.158
[18] In 1956 over a third of Secondary school pupils in Coventry were still in temporary teaching accommodation, Firth (1963), p.17

Materials and labourers were in short supply and Gibson was eager to use non-traditional systems which might provide permanent schools quickly and reasonably cheaply, without loss of quality. He had seen the promise inherent in the Brockhouse system and in 1947 he persuaded the education department to sanction an order for three primary schools using the system. Developing and refining the frame and cladding, from domestic to school use, was left to Glare and his deputy, Patrick Powell, working in collaboration with Heathcote.

Gibson did not want to take one route to school provision, as the Hertfordshire team had done, nor could he afford to spare the development time required. Consequently the team working on the Brockhouse system did not take the approach followed by Johnson-Marshall's Herts team. Instead they focussed on producing a viable structural system, rather than evolving a completely new design approach.

Other Coventry schools being planned at the time ranged from the more traditionally built Manor Park School, Cheylesmore, to the all-aluminium Whitmore Park School. Designed by Sheppard and Robson, this used the BAC Mark I system which they had developed with the Bristol Aeroplane Company. With an intake of 880 children, it was the largest aluminium school in the country and its reliance on 'bay planning' resulted in a vast grid of interconnecting classroom blocks and long corridors around enclosed courtyards (see Figure 78).[19]

Construction of the Henry Parkes School, the first in the Brockhouse system, began in 1949. Work on Manor Park School and Radford Primary started at the same time. Despite the differing constructional methods, all three schools shared the pre-war 'finger-type plan' which lent itself most naturally to the recommendations of the Wood Report.

[19]*AR,* November 1951, p.318

Henry Parkes Primary was built on an eight acre site, not far from the Unibuilt houses.[20] It effectively comprised three separate units (see Figure 72), each with their own head teacher: a nursery, an infants' department and a juniors' department.[21] The nursery to the south-west had a semi-enclosed courtyard play area and south-east facing playrooms.[22] The junior department (see Figure 74) was also south-east facing and had three toilet and cloakroom blocks running to the north-west, each one serving a pair of classrooms. From the junction between the two departments the juniors' assembly hall and its stage linked through to the infants' assembly hall which in turn adjoined the north-east end of the infants' department. Here the toilet and cloakroom blocks ran parallel to the main block rather than at right angles to it.

Supported on a concrete raft, the steel frames were set between gable ends of cavity block construction and, in accordance with day-lighting requirements and ventilation needs, the classrooms were glazed from sill height to ceiling. The corridors were also fully glazed and windows between the corridor and classroom provided extra lighting for the north-west sides of the rooms.

The booklet produced for the official opening ceremony noted that 'within the limitations of the site, it has been possible to create a feeling of sunshine and light, fresh air and warmth. The children will have freedom of movement and will enjoy good shapes, colours and textures and effective simplicity of design.[23]

As construction of Henry Parkes School began, design of the second school in the Brockhouse system, Parkgate School, Holbrooks, was underway

[20] *A&BN*, 12 March 1948, pp.244-46; *AD*, October 1950, pp.266-71
[21] *AD*, Ibid., p.266
[22] *A&BN*, Ibid., p.244
[23] City of Coventry, 'Post-war schools in Coventry', *Official Opening of Manor Park Primary School and Henry Parkes Primary School*, *29 March 1950* (Coventry, 1950)

(see Figure 75). The frame was modified to take a flat roof rather than the earlier shallow pitch, and brick was used for the gable ends. This time there were just infants and juniors departments, each with a separate hall, but linked by the kitchen and dining areas.[24] The site for the school was steeply sloping and prone to mining subsidence, so the building was planned to run parallel to the east-west contours and was designed with slip-joints at intervals to reduce the risk of subsidence damage. The slope ruled out toilet blocks at right angles to the classrooms and instead these were placed parallel to the corridors. As a result, despite having the same bay planning and long connecting corridors, the school appears more compact than Henry Parkes.[25]

Henry Parkes School opened in April 1950, Parkgate School opened at the beginning of September 1952 and third school in the series, St Christopher's, Allesley, opened a few weeks later. Here although the bay planning was still in evidence, the framing system had been developed and the main classroom block was two storeys, the first multi-storey use of the light-gauge frame in the country (see Figure 76). Cladding materials were now brick and aluminium sheet with channel stiffeners, brick was again used for the gable ends of the blocks. Although the new materials gave the building a neat and robust appearance, the time benefits gained in the erection of the frame were to an extent negated by the time needed for the brickwork, the construction of which made the building programme dependent, once again, upon the availability of bricklayers.[26]

Despite this, the system was proving successful and Glare and his team wanted to continue its development. Gibson, however, was in discussions with

[24] The departments were run as strictly separate units and teaching staff met only twice a year. Information from Headteacher Anne Mitchell.
[25] CHC CCD/AP/1/37/20/1-5, CCD/CE/46/4/13/24-29 Parkgate School plans and elevations August 1949.
[26] *Prefabrication*, June 1955, p.360

Stirrat Johnson-Marshall to see what contribution Coventry could make to the work of the MoE Development Group, and eventually collaboration began on developing the BAC Mark I system which had been used for Whitmore Park School. The BAC Mark IA version was unveiled at Limbrick Wood Junior and Infants School, in 1952 (see Figure 77).[27]

The system had been amended to provide the greater flexibility of semi-grid planning and the school had a radically different character to its predecessor at Whitmore Park. Classroom heights and cill heights had been reduced and the distinctive stabilising fins of the Mark I system had gone, but the most radical change was in the planning of the school.[28] The long corridors and barrack-like blocks of classrooms had been replaced by a far more compact plan, similar to those being developed in Hertfordshire (see Figure 79). Known as the 'hen and chicks' grouping, the assembly hall formed the centre of the group with toilets and paired groups of classrooms radiating from it. Circulation space was reduced to a minimum and teaching areas were designed and lit to allow group work, thereby allowing the teacher to adopt a more flexible and responsive teaching method.[29] Following the lead of the Hertfordshire schools, particular attention was paid to the use of colour in the classrooms and other areas of the building. Furnishings were also specially designed by the Coventry team, including moveable coat trolleys which could be wheeled into drying rooms.[30] The *Daily Graphic* described the school as 'just like home.'[31]

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[27] BAC Mark IA was also used for Aldermoor Farm Primary School, Coventry. The *CET*, 19 January 1953, noted that the shell of the building was completed in 7 hours.
[28] *Prefabrication*, June 1955, p.363
[29] *RIBAJ*, October 1952, p.446
[30] Ibid., p.448; Stirrat Johnson-Marshall paid particular attention to the design of these trolleys, suggesting more robust designs for the coat hooks: Information from Douglas Chalk, interviewed 23 June 2006.
[31] *Daily Graphic*, 17 September 1952

BAC Mark IA was not intended as a production model, but as a step towards the development of the system for use in secondary schools and Gibson once again offered Coventry as the test ground for the work. The Mark II system, capable of construction up to four storeys, was eventually employed for Lyng Hall Girls' School, the third of the MoE/Coventry collaborations, and for Whitley Abbey and Foxford Comprehensives (see Figure 80).[32]

In June 1953 Robert Matthew addressed a symposium of the Aluminium Development Association about the use of aluminium in building. He saw 'great promise in the works of the designers in the Ministry of Education' and felt that the 'fuller potentialities of aluminium for prefabrication' could be realised.[33] He based his hope primarily on the 'abandonment of the conception of the whole building unit and in its place a concentration on the manufacture of relatively small, flexible components'.[34] In the event this would not happen with the BAC system, but the concept of focussing on components rather than on the 'whole building' would eventually become central to the success of the CLASP system.

While Gibson's schools' team focussed on primary schools, Coventry's Education Committee had been considering how to respond to the requirements of the 1944 Butler Act. In 1946 they decided to opt for the multilateral system; offering grammar, modern and technical streams, taught as individual units, but brought together on one school site rather than as separate schools.[35] Ten or eleven of these schools would be built, each of 1200 pupils. In 1947 this decision was changed and the City committed itself to providing

[32] All three schools have now been demolished and redeveloped. The City's only remaining example of the BAC Mark II system is a three storey block at Foxford School and Community Arts College, Longford. This is due to be replaced under the Building Schools for the Future scheme.
[33] *A&BN*, 9 July 1953, p.50
[34] Ibid., p.50
[35] Firth (1963), p.14

comprehensive secondary education within ten or eleven schools of around 1800 pupils each.[36]

The Conservative Minister of Education, Florence Horsbrugh, saw Coventry's particular circumstances as offering 'an unusual opportunity for experiment', but actively worked against adoption of the comprehensive system. [37]

Despite the lack of Government agreement to the city's proposals, Glare and his architects still had to begin the design process for the secondary schools. Planning therefore had to accommodate the comprehensive system but allow for the possibility of reversion to the multilateral system, and also had to take account of phased construction.

Brockhouse was now marketing its frame to other authorities, but it had several disadvantages; it was still tied to the bay system, which limited its flexibility and Brockhouse could not provide their own cladding system or roofing. Although it had proved successful in Coventry, Glare reported to the Ministry that he felt the Brockhouse system was too inflexible to justify its use at that time.[38] Despite his misgivings, the production of the successful two-storey Brockhouse frame for St Christopher's School, Allesley, may have led him to think again and he and his team decided to use the system for one of the city's first comprehensive schools, Caludon Castle Boys' School, Wyken. The limitations of the system still applied, however, and this would affect the planning and layout of the site.

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[36] Ibid., p.15; Comprehensive education in Coventry is discussed in Robert Burgess, 'Changing Concepts of Secondary Education: Coventry's Comprehensive Schools', in Bill Lancaster & Tony Mason (eds), *Life and Labour in a 20th Century City: The Experience of Coventry* (Coventry: University of Warwick, 1986), pp.288-320; The grammar and secondary school system continued to operate alongside the new comprehensives and full comprehensive education was only achieved in 1975.

[37] Ibid., p.14; Saint (1987), p.128

[38] Saint (1987), p.162 Glare reported to the MoE in December 1950.

In 1953, Coventry finally gained Ministerial permission to proceed with its comprehensive schools 'on the understanding that each of them is to be regarded as experimental and that the Authority will ensure that it is possible to use the buildings for separate schools later should this be found desirable'.[39]

In contrast to the seven acre site which Spence worked with at Sydenham, Caludon Castle was allocated a site of some sixty acres. As will be seen, however, the freedom which this gave the architects appears to have resulted in less considered thought being given to the implications of the planning decisions made. Making full use of the space available and the topography of the site, which sloped fairly steeply down to the River Sowe, the school was planned as a series of widely separated units at the northern end of the site, looking down towards the playing fields to the south (see Figure 81).

Taking its cue from the nearby site of the medieval Caludon Castle, the central area of the school was a large, open, circular area, known as the Bailey. Forming a continuous arc around the northern paved half of this area were the gymnasia, assembly hall, administrative and staff rooms and science block, and at the centre of the group was the main entrance to the school; echoing a castle barbican, a broad gateway ran beneath the first floor library (see Figures 87 and 88). To the east of the Bailey was a block of five interconnected buildings housing arts and crafts, woodwork and metal work departments. An east-west service road bisected the site, running through the middle of the Bailey, and to the south of this road lay the house blocks

As discussed in the opening to this chapter, architects had few precedents to follow in planning the new comprehensive schools. The buildings posed many challenges in design, not least in dealing in the problems of accommodating around 1800 pupils. There was a fear that the overwhelming

[39] Firth (1963), p.15

size of the schools would alienate pupils and leave them feeling lost within the educational system. Coventry's Education Committee took the decision to adopt the grammar school 'house' system for the new comprehensive schools. It was intended that:

> The subdivision of the school into ten units each containing pupils of varying ability and age, will overcome the impersonality of a large school and at the same time bring every pupil into close personal contact with a House Master who will be responsible for guiding the work and activities of his pupils.[40]

Rather than simply allocating pupils to a house and denoting their membership through a different school badge or tie, the decision was taken to give each house physical expression through the use of individual house blocks, and to plan the new schools around these units.

The house blocks were a new concept and there were differing ideas as to their function and organisation. In the majority of the new schools, two houses were allocated to each, but several different approaches were taken to their planning. The Woodlands Boys' School, Tile Hill, opened on the same day as Caludon Castle School in September 1954.[41] This school, the third of the MoE/Coventry collaborations, was the first involvement of the Development Group in a comprehensive school. The single storey house blocks (see Figure 82) were designed purely for social use and corporate activities; dining and house assemblies took place there and books and kit were stored there, but lessons took place in separate blocks.

At Whitley Abbey, a co-educational school, a similar approach was taken, but the blocks were divided with boys on one side and girls on the other,

[40] City of Coventry Education Authority, *Official Opening of The Woodlands Comprehensive Secondary School for Boys, 12th October 1955* (Coventry 1955). The official opening ceremony took place over a year after the school opened to pupils.

[41] Woodlands School is now a Grade 2 listed building. It was built using the Hills system, previously employed by the Development Group for St Crispin's Secondary School, Wokingham. The development of the Hills system from the Hertfordshire schools to Woodlands is discussed by Saint (1987).

the kitchen and dining room being common to both (see Figure 83).[42] Each side had a common room, quiet room and locker spaces, house master or mistress's office and staff rooms. The girls' side also had a housecraft room and a model flat with living room, bedroom and bathroom. Apart from this, no general or specialist teaching rooms were provided in the blocks. It was hoped that by separating teaching and social functions, and thereby 'keeping "foreigners" out of the house blocks, a more personal and intimate atmosphere' would be created.[43]

At Lyng Hall Girls' School, the house blocks (see Figure 84) accommodated two houses. Each had a housecraft room and staff and quiet rooms, but there were no kitchens. Food was prepared centrally and delivered to each house block and dining took place in the house rooms which were intended to be multi-functional spaces.[44] Unlike Whitley Abbey School, the blocks were two storeys and had classrooms on the first floor. This gave the house blocks 'a greater significance in the educational life of the school.'[45]

At Caludon Castle School a different plan was used and the house blocks gained perhaps their most overt expression in any of Coventry's comprehensive schools (see Figure 85). The blocks were essentially 'T' shaped with a first floor over the central area. Each block had a kitchen and dining room on the ground floor and separate house rooms, cloak and locker rooms. The houses did not mix within the block and had separate sittings for dinner. The house masters' offices and staff rooms were on the first floor together with a classroom and toilets.

[42] The first instalment of Whitley Abbey School opened on 11 September 1955: Firth (1963), p.132
[43] *AJ*, 28 February 1957, p.332
[44] Ibid., p.329
[45] Ibid., p.329

Running across the southern end of each house block was a linear two storey block of eight classrooms for general teaching. These were linked to the common rooms by an enclosed ground floor corridor and staff accessed the classrooms via an enclosed, glazed bridge at first floor level.

In line with the southern half of the Bailey area, five of these blocks swept in an east-west arc across the site, presenting a regimented and disciplined appearance (see Figure 81). Perhaps this was thought to be in keeping with the castle imagery and befitting of a boys school, but it contrasted sharply with the closer grouping and more informal layouts of Woodlands, Whitley Abbey and Lyng Hall schools (see Figure 86).

Although other schools had similarly large sites, Caludon Castle was the only one designed with such a spreading plan. The design of its house and class blocks militated against a closer grouping for the buildings, but the problems caused by the planning must have become obvious fairly quickly. According to which house blocks they were in, some pupils had very long distances to walk between lessons; those in the most westerly block were nearly a quarter of a mile from the swimming pool and sports hall. The house blocks had been intended to foster a greater sense of belonging, but at Caludon their isolated nature led to some pupils feeling isolated from the main body of the school.[46]

Although the planning of the site was not entirely successful, the grouping of the administrative and specialist blocks was the most distinctive of all Coventry's post-war secondary schools. The decision to reflect the area's history in the design of the buildings was in opposition to the very modern nature of the Brockhouse system, and to ideas of truth to materials and structure; however it gave the school a very distinctive character.

[46] Information from Brian Walford former Caludon Castle pupil.

In keeping with the allusions to castle architecture, the appearance of greatest architectural strength was given to the barbican like entrance block. Dark red brick, buff coloured exposed aggregate panels and green Westmorland slate lent the gateway an appearance of solidity and permanence (see Figure 87). The only external reference to the Brockhouse system was a narrow horizontal band of corrugated steel sheet, between the top of the library windows and the eaves; its vertical corrugation hinting at crenellations over the top of the gateway. Below the library windows horizontal concrete panels with exposed aggregate, suggestive of buff coloured stone, added to the visual appearance of solidity. To either side of the gateway and library, small square windows, dressed again with Westmorland stone, suggested embrasures in the brick walls. On the inner, south, face of the gateway, the library again had a narrow band of corrugated steel sheet below the eaves but below this the wall was fully glazed (see Figure 88).

To the east and west of the gateway the blocks were angled to follow the perimeter of the Bailey. The same mixture of materials was used, but the inner elevations were predominantly clad in the buff coloured concrete panels. The most overt expression of the Brockhouse frame was in the assembly and games hall on the west side of the Bailey. A wide band of the corrugated steel ran below the eaves, but below this the areas between the frames were fully glazed. The changing room block on the west side of the hall was brick faced and a large crenellated pattern was marked out in blue bricks around its three sides.

In the house blocks the complexity of the external elevations, particularly at the junction between the house block and the classroom block, combined with the varied materials to create a rather fussy over-detailed appearance. The

classroom blocks were clad in brick, with a band of corrugated steel between the ground and first floor windows. The narrow panels of concrete with exposed aggregate were used for the gable ends of the blocks.

The Brockhouse system was not used again in Coventry, but the firm went on to collaborate with the MoE on The Parks Secondary Modern School, Belper, Derbyshire, 1953-5. The system used in Coventry had followed the 8 foot 3 inch module recommended by the Wood Committee, but for Belper it was revised to a more flexible 3 feet 4 inch module and diagonal bracing was added to the frame.[47]

In the autumn of 1954, following a particularly difficult meeting of the Education Committee, Gibson took the decision to apply for the post of Nottinghamshire County Architect.[48] The closing date for applications had passed, but Gibson was offered the job and handed in his resignation. Despite a procession of dignitaries to his door asking him to reconsider and a formal request from Coventry to Nottinghamshire that he be released from his new contract, Gibson left the city at the end of January 1955.[49] David Percival took over his role in a temporary capacity until May, when Arthur Ling became the new City Architect and Planning Officer.[50]

Coventry's loss was undoubtedly Nottinghamshire's gain and Gibson was able to revert to the small team and the personal involvement which he had enjoyed during the early days of the Coventry department.

Nottinghamshire was facing a serious crisis in its school building programme; most of the budget had gone into unsuccessful attempts to prevent

[47] *Post-War Building Studies No.2, Standard Construction for Schools* (HMSO, 1944); Saint (1987), p.163
[48] BLSA Gibson interview (1984): A problem had arisen over the wood specified for school woodwork benches and a Councillor told Gibson that he should be sacked if he had approved it.
[49] *The Times*, 15 October 1954, p.4; *News Chronicle*, 22 February 1955; Gibson left a staff of 165 and work worth £12 Million (*AJ*, 20 January 1955); BLSA interview, 1984, Tape 2: it is clear from the recording of the interview that the issue still caused Gibson distress.
[50] *Guardian*, 25 January 1955, p.5

structural damage from mining subsidence, completions were well behind schedule and the relationship between the architects and the education department had reached the point where 'they hated one another's guts'.[51]

Gibson's immediate response was to introduce a system of 'serial contracting' to get fourteen schools under way as quickly as possible using the timber Derwent system.[52] He then put together a new group of architects, attracting several from the Hertfordshire schools' team, notably Dan Lacey, Henry Swain and Alan Meikle, and they began to investigate the problem of subsidence.[53]

The project files show a very systematic approach to analysing the problem and detailing the requirements of the solution.[54] Criteria were set against which the various available building methods could be assessed and the resources of the building industry locally and nationally were investigated. This provided a basis against which to judge and analyse alternative methods of building.[55] Various systems were ruled out early in the process: timber had its limitations; pre-stressed concrete frames were unsuitable for subsidence sites; Hills of West Bromwich were not prepared to co-operate or to redesign their system and BAC were going out of production.[56] Gibson's focus fell on Brockhouse, but the MoE were wary of the firm's poor organisation, which had caused problems at Belper. Gibson, however, knew the quality of their work and knew that Heathcote was an engineer of ingenuity and that his experience as a mechanical engineer would be useful in developing a frame which responded to moving ground.

[51] BLSA Interview 1984. Tape 2
[52] Saint (1987), p.165 and BSLA interview 1984, Tape 2
[53] Saint (1987), p.165
[54] Nottinghamshire County Archives (NCA) CC/AR4/1-80 Gibson was not simply concerned with the structural system; minutes from the second development meeting, 8 September 1955, noted that someone needed start thinking about unfixed furniture (CC/AR4/1)
[55] NCA CC/AR4/1 Meeting minutes, 13 September 1955
[56] Ibid., minutes 19 September 1955 and 28 September 1955.

Collaboration with Heathcote began in the autumn of 1955. For the architects working on the project it proved to be a new, and slightly strange, way of working, as they were detailing the components of the system without having any image in mind of the finished building.[57] By February 1956 the basis of the structural design had been decided and the new flexible frame, with pin-jointing and spring-loaded wind braces, had unofficially been christened the 'rock and roll' system.[58] Construction of the site slab for the mock-up frame began in April 1956.[59]

Brockhouse now realised that Nottinghamshire's 1957-58 programme of school building was too small for them to proceed with production, so Gibson immediately contacted Coventry and Derbyshire to ask if they could contribute schools from their programmes and also contribute to component design. Both were in agreement and work began on the first of the Nottinghamshire schools, Bancroft Lane Primary, Mansfield, in January 1957, the school opened in the following September.

Having successfully brought together three local authorities in the development and contracting process, the Nottinghamshire team were able to bring in others. Durham, Glamorgan and the West Riding of Yorkshire joined, and Leicester City Council and Warwickshire County Council agreed initially to build one school each in the system.[60] In July 1957 Lord Hailsham presided over the official inauguration of the Consortium of Local Authorities' Special Programme, CLASP, and the Brockhouse system finally gained an official name.[61]

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[57] Saint (1987), p.167

[58] Saint (1987), p.166; Swain recalled that the team realised the elasticity of the metal braces rendered the springs unnecessary. Gibson agreed, but said they would keep the springs because 'people understand springs' and it would give them more faith in the system: RIBA Memorial Celebration 1992.

[59] NCA CC/AR4/1 Minutes 1 February 1956 and 30 April 1956.

[60] *A&BN*, 11 December 1957, p.775

[61] Saint (1987), p.174

In January 1958, 'for devising an anti-subsidence building system and developing the idea of team-work in the local authority office', Gibson and his schools' team were named among Astragal's 'Men of the year' in the *AJ*.[62] Gibson remained at Nottinghamshire until March when he became Director-General of Works in the War Office.[63] He brought his new department into the CLASP consortium and the system came into use for military buildings. In October 1959 Spence, as President of the RIBA, was involved in persuading the Government to fund the building of a CLASP school for the MoE's exhibition at the Milan Triennale (see Figure 89).[64] Spence later wrote to the Minister of Education, Sir David Eccles:

> What a pity it would have been if Britain lost the unique opportunity to show the world her leadership in school design. I understand that a very good position has been allocated to this exhibit and I think this will be the most important showing so far of British architecture and design on any Triennale.[65]

Spence's assessment was proved correct when the school won the prestigious *Gran Premio con Menzione Speziale*, an award which Reyner Banham believed 'went squarely where it belonged':[66] In his review of the school, in 1963, Banham wrote:

> Maybe this was not architecture in Le Corbusier's classic definition of 'magnificent, cunning and correct play of masses brought together in light', but the Italian sunlight, which shows up most mistakes in architecture, could only show how cunning and correct CLASP was. If magnificence was missing, so was the pomposity that results from trying to be magnificent in the wrong context – and, in this context, most reasonable men would settle for CLASP.[67]

Despite Banham's approbation CLASP had yet to pass the ultimate test; the designers still had no idea whether the system would behave as predicted

[62] *AJ*, 16 January 1958, p.80
[63] *Guardian*, 4 March 1958, p.4
[64] RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/8/73-74 letters 28 October 1959 and 30 October 1959.
[65] RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/8/72 letter 3 December 1959
[66] Reyner Banham, *Guide to Modern Architecture* (London: Architectural Press, 1963), p.142
[67] Ibid., p.146

when a subsidence wave hit. Eventually in 1962 the integrity of the system was proved beyond doubt when subsidence hit five CLASP schools. Two of the buildings suffered slight damage, but the other three were unaffected and Gibson's faith in the system and his team was vindicated.[68]

[68] Saint (1987), p.170

8. Presidency of the RIBA.

> Those of us who are members of the RIBA are very proud of it. It is something to be proud of. We are not as other men – we are like eggs with a label “Fresh” compared with eggs which are just eggs.
>
> Anon., 1938[1]

In 1959 John Summerson recalled once predicting that 1957 would prove to be a ‘critical year in English architecture’. He had expected it to be the year when ‘in the course of nature a new generation of rebels would be asking rough questions on the doorstep’.[2] To Summerson's satisfaction the MARS Group had ‘voluntarily extinguished itself’ at midnight on the 28th January 1957.[3]

The year brought a much greater crisis, however, as ‘a new generation of rebels’ brought their 'rough questions' to the doorstep of the RIBA, questioning not architectural theory and style, but the Institute itself: its organisation, management and ability to lead the profession. The crisis, sparked by the financial difficulties of the Institute, brought to a head many long-running issues and threatened the stability, reputation and status of both the RIBA and the profession. It saw the RIBA Council accused of 'disgrace', 'foolishness', of running 'an amateur show', of being 'undemocratic and unrepresentative', and of allowing 'nepotism, old-boy-ism, and other tactics reminiscent of the “rotten boroughs”' to operate.[4]

Kenneth Cross, a ‘quiet, soft-spoken, and unassuming’ man, became President of the Institute in 1956 and saw the AGM change ‘from a peaceful, badly attended, and unquestioning affair to a crowded battlefield where officers

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[1] *OA,* November 1938, p.194
[2] Trevor Dannatt, *Modern Architecture in Britain* (London: Batsford, 1959), p.12
[3] Ibid.
[4] *AJ,* 13 February 1958, p.235; *RIBAJ,* June 1958, p.266; *AJ,* 27 February 1957, p.307; *AJ,* 1 May 1958, p.642

of the institute were attacked and received little support from the floor.'[5] Cross 'met the storms graciously and with understanding', but the Institute had 'reached a critical position' and the speed with which it could repair its image and its relationship with the membership depended on the qualities of the incoming President.[6] That unenviable honour was accepted by Spence in 1958.

Robert Matthew, who took over the presidency in 1962, said in his inaugural address that the RIBA expected its President to be 'a superman who, in addition to earning his bread and butter, should be available 25 hours a day, 8 days a week and 13 months in the year, to discharge all possible manner of functions'.[7] If any President set that precedent it was Spence.

His enormous energy and determination marked him out from previous Presidents and his work output was remarkable. He oversaw the handling of the Institute's financial difficulties, the formulation and implementation of a more democratic and accountable Council and Executive structure and the re-modelling of the Institute's administrative and committee structure. His public relations flair brought architecture back into the spotlight and helped to rebuild the confidence of the profession.

By the time he left office the RIBA was a very different organisation, its Council more open and democratic than ever before and its administration no longer 'run as a society for professional gentlemen', but being re-organised on 'quasi-Civil Service lines'.[8] Architectural education was moving from the last vestiges of the Beaux-Arts system to a 'Modernist hegemony' or 'official system' and Modernists, largely representatives of the salaried sector, were in the

[5]Gontran Goulden, 'Cross, Kenneth Mervyn Baskerville (1890–1968)', rev. Kaye Bagshaw, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford University Press, 2004) http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32643 [accessed 30 March 2009]
[6]Ibid.; *AJ,* 27 February 1958, p.308
[7]Glendinning (2008), p.309
[8]*AJ,* 27 February 1958, p.307; Jules Lubbock, *The tyranny of taste: The politics of Architecture and Design in Britain 1550-1960* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995), p.361

majority on the Council and, for a relatively brief period, would produce a succession of Presidents including Gibson.[9]

Gibson became President in 1964 and faced little of the turbulence which had marked Spence's presidency. His Council reflected the constitutional reforms which had been formulated and agreed during Spence's term of office; the Allied Societies had been re-organised, as had the administration of the Institute. Architectural Education was moving towards full implementation of the recommendations of the Oxford Conference, and the focus of thought was shifting towards the training of technicians. The status of the salaried sector was not as high on the agenda as it had been during Spence's presidency and there was an emphasis on building productivity and greater cooperation between the various parts of the building industry.

This chapter begins with an examination of some of the long-running problems brought to a head by the financial crisis of 1957, the reaction of the membership to the difficulties and the RIBA's response. It will look at the events of Spence's term of office and the style of his presidency, and will assess the achievements of his tenure.

It has been the prerogative of each President to retain possession of their presidential correspondence and papers. In Spence's case there are over 3,600 items in the Spence archive, in contrast there are no presidential papers in the Gibson collection, or the RIBA archive. Accessing committee and Council papers within the RIBA archive was beyond the research time available for this thesis and the less detailed narrative of Gibson's presidency is therefore drawn largely from newspaper and journal articles.

[9]Crinson & Lubbock (1994), p.134 & 148

8.1. Basil Spence PRIBA

8.1a. The gathering crisis: prelude to Spence's presidency.

> Does not the RIBA wish to represent the majority of its members? It is, or should be, as democratic an institution as the Government of this country, and should be as much subject to criticism for its policy vacillations or ineptitudes as any group of political leaders.[1]
>
> *Official Architect*, 1937

Despite the post-war growth of the public architectural sector and the fact that its employees formed a clear majority within the RIBA, the Institute was still largely organized as it had been when the private sector had dominated its membership. Inertia within its administration meant that changes tended to be cosmetic rather than fundamental.

Representation and status remained at the top of the agenda for the public sector, but only about eighty members attended the 1957 AGM to discuss the issues, a 'marked contrast' to the hundreds who had filled the hall in 1955.[2] It would appear that the long-running nature of the problem was leading to a sense of apathy amongst the membership.[3]

In May 1957 the *AJ* published short statements from some of those standing for election to Council.[4] Many nominees mentioned status, both for salaried members and the profession as a whole, but there were other concerns. Percy Johnson-Marshall's call for 'every building to be designed by an architect, and for every Local Authority to have its own architect', underlined the fact that the RIBA had never managed to achieve full closure of the profession, or to remove architecture from the hands of local authority

[1] *OA,* October 1937, p.23
[2] *AJ,* 16 May 1957, p.736
[3] Ibid., p.736
[4] Ibid., pp.738-739

surveyors and engineers. Gibson and Spence were also nominees for Council. Gibson wrote of the need for architects to work with building and civil engineering contractors in order to 'recover for the profession, many commissions which at present no architect gets a smell at'.[5] Spence considered strengthening ties with Commonwealth architects to be the most important task facing the RIBA and wanted the profession to improve its public relations; 'the public must realise the importance of good design'.[6]

There was no hint in the statements of any underlying issues which might cause additional trouble for the Institute. Indeed Astragal, in the September issue of the *AJ,* recalled Summerson's prediction about 1957 being a 'critical year' for the profession and pointed out that there were only 110 days of the year left in which to produce a crisis.[7] It eventually arrived in December.

At the RIBA Council meeting on 10th December 1957, the Finance and House Committee reported a deficit of over £100,000 in the Institute's finances.[8] In response the Council decided to increase annual subscriptions and exam fees and reduce the monies allocated for other purposes such as public relations.

The meeting was reported in the architectural press in February. Under the Editorial headline 'The disgrace of the Royal Institute', the *AJ* asked how the deficit had arisen pointing out that fees had increased only twelve months previously, and that the Institute's finances in 1955 recorded a surplus 'appreciably greater than was anticipated'.[9] The running of the Institute 'by means of clerks and the odd spare time of practising architects' had to end and the profession had to push forward with policy which would 'strengthen the

[5] *AJ,* 16 May 1957, p.736
[6] Ibid., p.739
[7] *AJ*, 12 September 1957, p.380
[8] *AJ,* 13 February 1958, p.241
[9] Ibid., p.235

architect'.[10] Although the Editorial did not mention reform of the Council and Executive structure, the inference was clear:

> the men to carry out such a policy are, at present, only the rank and file of the RIBA Council, and not the leaders and Officers of the Council as by reputation and ability they should be.[11]

The financial difficulties were in themselves damaging to the reputation of the Institute, but a sizeable proportion of the deficit was due to increases in costs for building work at the Institute's headquarters, and this reflected badly on a profession which promoted the architect as the natural head of the building process.[12] The *AJ* believed that many would view this 'as clear-cut evidence of the profession's inability to handle costs'.[13]

Ironically, the Editorial was followed by the report of the Cost Committee, which, in considering how architects could 'contribute to economical building' through cost control, had noted 'an absence of any widespread use of systematic cost control in architectural practice'.[14]

For the older members of the Institute the crisis was depressingly familiar; it mirrored, in almost every detail, a financial crisis nearly twenty years earlier. It is important to note here the points which were raised at the time of that earlier crisis, because they highlight both the inertia of the Institute and the longevity of issues which were now seen to lie at the heart of the current problems.

In January 1939 the Editorial of *OA* had noted that construction of the new premises at Portland Place, and problems in selling the original premises, had left the Institute facing a deficit of £95,000.[15] While the failure of the Council to manage the Institute's finances served 'to make the architectural profession

[10] *AJ,* 13 February 1958, p.235
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., p.244
[13] Ibid.
[14] *AJ,* 16 February 1958, p.243
[15] *OA,* January 1939, p.301

appear ridiculous in the eyes of the general public', the problem was not just mismanagement, but had been caused by the organisation of the Council and its poor relationship with its members'.[16] The Editorial noted that the problems had led to 'open expressions of dissatisfaction that have been simmering beneath the surface for many years' and as a result:

> many will demand a drastic alteration in the method of election to the Council, the nomination for which is at present so largely in the hands of Councillors already elected; and many no doubt will require an alteration in the by-law which gives the Council rather than the individual members the power to summon a Special General Meeting.
>
> […] now that the cat is out of the bag even the waverers must be convinced of the vital need for a complete reorganisation if the architectural profession is to live. It is the undoubted duty of every member of the Institute to demand an immediate Special General Meeting and a referendum to decide on the future of the RIBA.[17]

Now, eighteen years on, the Institute again faced a debt of equal proportions, once again the profession's status in the eyes of the public had been diminished and once again the organisation of the RIBA Council was seen to be the root cause of the difficulties.

Having accused the Institute of 'disgrace', subsequent editions of the *AJ* maintained the pressure. Its Editorial on 27th February asked 'Who runs the RIBA?' and pointed out that the size of the Council, with over seventy members, made it 'little more than a debating chamber and a rubber-stamp'. Likewise the Executive Committee was too 'unwieldy' to offer the leadership needed.[18]

As the Editors also pointed out, the Executive Committee was dominated by Honorary Officers and all of these had to be Fellows of the Institute.[19] Some unelected members had maintained a continuity of office for several years and,

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[16] *OA,* January 1939, p.301
[17] Ibid.
[18] *AJ,* 27 February 1958, p.307
[19] Ibid.

although offering some advantages, 'the dangers of even partial autocracy' were great.[20] The financial troubles of the Institute were:

> almost certainly, partly the result of the Honorary Officers being out of touch with the membership, and therefore being unaware of the exacting requirements of a professional body in these complex post-war years. For too long the RIBA has been run as a society for professional gentlemen […]. It has been, in fact, an amateur show, which was no doubt quite satisfactory for pre-war conditions, but which is cruelly handicapped when it attempts to deal with the more exacting conditions of today.[21]

The Institute needed professional administration and its future depended upon who became the next President.

The membership and architectural media may not have known just how critical the crisis was. The Institute had applied to its Capital Issues Committee for permission to borrow £100,000 and the Committee had refused. On 28th March the President, Kenneth Cross, wrote to Spence and other members of the Finance and House Committee to say that a new application to borrow £70,000 had been agreed to. He continued:

> I am writing to you personally to explain that, had we not been so fortunate as to obtain this permission, the financial position of the RIBA would have been desperate and might have resulted in the cessation of the greater part of our work with the resultant fall in membership. It is only by the barest margin that this catastrophe has been avoided.[22]

He believed that with 'the greatest care and economy, the position may be retrieved in a few years' and he asked every member of the Finance and House Committee to 'do everything in his power to see that all expenditure which is not absolutely essential is stopped'.[23]

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[20] *AJ,* 27 February 1958, p.307
[21] Ibid.
[22] RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/10/329 letter 28 March 1958
[23] Ibid.

Letters about the RIBA leadership continued to appear in the *AJ* and, with the depth of feeling against the Institute, it was clear that the AGM would provide a platform for members to express their grievances.[24]

In the week before the AGM, the *AJ* published a letter from Cleeve Barr, then Deputy Architect to the MoE, and Anthony Cox of the Architects' Co-Partnership. It briefly outlined the contents of a formal amendment, already submitted to the President for consideration at the AGM, which effectively amounted to a motion of censure against the Council.[25]

Barr and Cox believed that the Statement published by the Council earlier in the year 'revealed not only a serious failure to plan the Institute's business affairs, but also a remarkable state of complacency on the part of the Council, and a failure to appreciate the needs of the profession'.[26] At the heart of the problem lay the constitution of the Council, which was ‘undemocratic and unrepresentative of the general body of members'. This was 'the main reason for the gulf which exists between the feelings and needs of members and the actions of the Council'.[27]

They highlighted the practice of 'nomination of “representatives”' and the opportunities thus presented for 'nepotism, old-boy-ism, and other tactics reminiscent of the “rotten boroughs”', and questioned why non-elected members should have full voting rights and the opportunity of appointment to office.[28]

They did not believe that resignations would 'achieve any worth while end' and called, instead, on 'as many members as possible from the Provinces as well as London' to attend the meeting and 'express their views'. The Council

[24] *AJ,* 1 May 1958, p.643: Some members resigned including Robert Furneaux Jordan who had been an RIBA Fellow for 20 years and a member for 30 years.
[25] Ibid., p.642
[26] Ibid., p.642
[27] Ibid., p.642
[28] *AJ,* 1 May 1958, p.642

should be asked to 'think again on the financial issues' and to set up a special committee 'to reconsider the constitution of the Council to make it more democratic, and more representative of the majority of the membership'.[29]

Having received the resolution, Cross wrote to all Council members asking for as many as possible to attend the AGM:

> It may easily prove to be a very difficult meeting, and it will be a great support to the honorary officers and chairmen of Committees if other members of the Council are present to take part in the discussion and speak on the various points which may be raised.[30]

On the 6th May the ordinary membership turned out in force and an unprecedented 650 people crowded into the hall at Portland Place for the 120th AGM.[31] As the *AJ* reported:

> Twenty minutes before the kick-off [...] there was not an empty seat in the stands, there was little standing room in the terrace, and the crowds were still rolling in from places as far away as Nottingham (by special bus), Northampton and Devonshire. It was obviously going to be a big meeting [...] The only thing that remained in doubt was which side were they on, though the youthful appearance of the meeting suggested that the Council was in for a rough time.[32]

The report of the meeting published in the *AJ*, accompanied by photographs of the crowded hall and interspersed with comments on audience reactions, gives a clear sense of the general mood of the membership and the gulf between themselves and the Council.[33]

Cross opened the meeting and presented the Report of the Council. Spence, on the platform as Honorary Secretary and, at that point, President-elect, seconded the motion.[34] Barr rose almost immediately to ask when he might move his amendment and, according to the *AJ* there followed:

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[29]Ibid.
[30]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/10/314 letter 24 April 1958
[31]*RIBAJ,* June 1958, p.284
[32]*AJ,* 15 May 1958, p.746
[33]*RIBAJ,* June 1958, pp. 257-268
[34]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/10/332 Presidential nominations were decided in Council on 15 April 1958.

> a moment's silence, and then an outburst of cheers and applause that rolled round the hall, declaring as convincingly as a show of hands that all the 500 were behind Cleeve Barr and against the platform.[35]

With an agreement to consider the amendment as part of the financial section of the Report, the meeting continued with a question as to why no mechanism existed for the general membership to call for a special general meeting.[36] The President pointed out that Council members could be asked to call a special general meeting, but his comment that the council was 'widely representative' and had 'been recently reconstituted' was met with laughter.[37]

There was clearly a wide difference in perception between the Council and ordinary members, but this particular debate also underlined the difficulties faced by members trying to effect changes in the governance of the Institute, and the difficulties faced by the leadership in dealing with an increasingly unionised sector of the membership.

Following demands from the floor for a new or amended bye-law to allow ordinary members to call for a special general meeting, Cross reminded the meeting that bye-laws could only be amended 'by resolutions at two special meetings, and with the consent of the Privy Council'.[38] A lengthy procedural debate followed and the issue was finally resolved by Thurston Williams, who put forward the proposal as a formal amendment. Spence objected to this as the report contained no mention of bye-laws, but Williams assured him that he was not amending the Report, but the motion that the Report be received. As the *AJ* noted, Williams's work as chairman of the LCC staff association had

[35] *AJ,* 15 May 1958, p.746
[36] *OA,* January 1939, p.301: this issue had been raised by *OA* during the Institute's financial crisis in 1939.
[37] *AJ,* 15 May 1958, p.746; *RIBAJ,* May 1955, p.281:the composition of the elected section of the Council had been changed from 21 Fellows, 9 Associates and 3 Licentiates, to 9 Fellows, 9 Associates, 3 Licentiates and 9 corporate members of any class of membership.
[38] *AJ,* 15 May 1958, p.746

'made him a master of the procedural game' and his response 'effectively floored Mr Spence'.[39]

Officers who were not necessarily well versed in procedure were increasingly dealing with a section of the membership that was thoroughly conversant with such matters. The *AJ* report of the AGM summed up the problem: the meeting had been a 'game played without a referee', with the President 'clearly perplexed about what to do with questions, motions or amendments'.[40] The meeting had 'rolled along a circuitous path by its own momentum, such order as there was being provided by the promptings from the floor of Thurston Williams, Guy Oddie and Hilton Wright.'[41] Of these Williams and Oddie worked in the public sector.

The RIBA's Ad Hoc Committee on the representation of members in salaried employment had produced a report in January 1958 examining the issue of professional status in post-war society. It noted the problems faced by the profession in 'a newly egalitarian society', and the 'large sectors of society, of newly acquired importance' who were 'more than ever clamant in insisting on their “rights”'.[42]

It is interesting to compare this with the draft copy of the report, which had commented on the opportunities of the 1944 Education Act bringing people into the profession with a 'trade union rather than a traditional professional outlook', resulting in the assimilation into the profession of a 'minority who are not inhibited about clamouring for more money'.[43] The implication was clear: public sector architects had weakened the profession’s standing. Had the report been

[39]Ibid.
[40]*AJ,* 15 May 1958, p.746
[41]Ibid., p.746.
[42]Ibid., p.116 & 117
[43]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/1/311-315 (D.1843/57)

issued in this form the implications for the Institute, and its relationship with its public sector members, could have been grave.

Regardless of the trade union outlook and negotiating skills of public sector representatives, they had thus far proved relatively ineffectual against the in-built inertia of the RIBA; representation and reform were still key issues and, despite all efforts, the Council and Executive had remained relatively unchanged. When the AGM finally reached Barr's amendment, it was this latter point which formed the core of his motion of censure.

The undemocratic nature of the Council lay at the root of the Institute's problems and basic changes were needed in order 'to bring the Council once again into contact with the membership'.[44] To this end the AGM instructed the Council to carry out a comprehensive review of its organization, business affairs and financial policy, to ensure that honorary officers were appointed only from elected members of the Council, and to ensure that Council members with voting rights were elected by postal ballot.[45]

Anthony Cox seconded Barr's resolution noting that most members were 'aware of an ominous undercurrent of anger and discontent'. It was vital for the membership to have confidence in their Council, but he doubted 'whether *any* Council appointed in the manner in which ours is, can be said to enjoy such confidence except by some improbable and fortunate coincidence.'[46] It was essential to ensure that all Council members with voting rights were elected and that honorary officers were only appointed from elected members. Most of the audience must have been aware that the Honorary Treasurer and former Vice-President, Jefferiss Mathews, had stood unsuccessfully for election to Council

[44]*AJ,* 15 May 1958, p.745
[45]*AJ,* 15 May 1958, p.744. The Council also had to call a special general meeting, by December 1958, to report on progress. The resolution was accepted by Cross, with the proviso that the wording was altered from 'this AGM instructs the Council' to 'this AGM requests the Council'.
[46]Ibid.

three times and, despite losing by a wide margin on each occasion, had still held two of the most important offices in the Institute.[47]

When Barr's resolution was finally put to the vote, the motion was carried by around five hundred votes to ten. The *AJ* Editorial on the meeting viewed the resolution as 'unmistakeably a vote of censure on the Council' and noted that 'the character of the meeting, […] revealed starkly how remote some members, and probably a majority, of the Council have been from the feelings of the membership'.[48] Spence can have been left in little doubt that his presidency would be potentially extremely difficult, but also crucial in regaining the confidence of the membership and the public.

8.1b. Spence's Presidency, 1958-1960.

> Basil Spence set a new pattern for the presidency which it has only seldom been possible to follow.
>
> Richard Sheppard, 1977.[1]

On the 11th May 1958, "Pendennis", of *The Observer,* noted Spence's nomination for the presidency, the tone of the short piece suggesting that it heralded a change of direction for the Institute: 'the Royal Institute of British Architects [...] is apt to be regarded as a fuddy-duddy body: and quite a flurry has been caused by the election of BASIL SPENCE, the Coventry Cathedral man, to be its president'.[2] "Pendennis" noted that it was:

> in keeping with Spence's evangelical ardour that he should accept the job: with his bristling moustache and zealous eyes, he is sometimes known as "St Basil" by his more cynical colleagues, He is an incurable romantic, charming, kind and idealistic with a sense of duty which carries him to the remotest lecture halls.[3]

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[47] Jackson (1970), p.199
[48] *AJ* (15 May 1958),
[1] Richard Sheppard, Spence obituary, *RIBAJ* (January 1977), pp.40-41
[2] "Pendennis" 'Table Talk – St Basil', *Observer,* 11 May 1958, p.3
[3] Ibid.

Spence's sense of duty had already led him to a deep involvement in the running of the Institute. First elected to the Council in 1952 (Gibson was also elected at the same time), Spence was appointed as a Vice-President in 1954 and became Honorary Secretary in 1956.[4] He was re-elected for Council in 1957, gaining the highest number of votes among the Fellows nominated; Gibson was also re-elected with the largest vote for an Associate member.[5]

During his time on the Council Spence worked on several committees including the Executive Committee, of which he was Vice Chair; the Finance and House Committee; the Professional Conduct Committee and the Royal Gold Medal Committee.[6] His name also appears in connection with the Board of Architectural Education and the Policy Committee.[7]

While the events of the AGM received wide press coverage and set much of the agenda for Spence's presidency, less well reported was the presentation on the same day of Sir Leslie Martin's report on architectural education. Its recommendations were agreed in principle by the Council and set out major changes to the system of architectural education.[8] Working out and agreeing proposals for the implementation of these changes would occur during Spence's presidency.

Although Spence's election may have caused a 'flurry', he was a popular choice. When he officially took office in July the *AJ* headed their report 'The Popular President', and *Prefabrication* noted that his election had been 'applauded in both the UK architectural press and by the members of the RIBA themselves'.[9]

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[4]*RIBAJ,* July 1952, p.309; *RIBAJ,* May 1954, p.266; *RIBAJ,* July 1955, p.350; *RIBAJ,* July 1956, p.366
[5]*RIBAJ,* July 1957, p.345
[6]*RIBAJ,* May 1952, p.247; RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/1/123*RIBAJ,* May 1956, p.282; RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/1/168; MS 2329/X/7/10/492, 616, 617 & 620
[7]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/10/609; MS 2329/X/7/10/597
[8]*AJ,* 22 May 1958, pp.772-7 The report was based on the Oxford Conference held in April.
[9]*AJ,* 3 July 1958, p.2; *Prefabrication,* July 1958, p.391

Both journals noted his energy, popularity and success and it is clear from their comments that his appointment heralded a new style of presidency; the *AJ* pointed out that it was 'many years since the profession had as President someone with such a deservedly well-known name'.[10] *Prefabrication* viewed his election as 'an event of great importance to the realm of architectural thought in the UK. For the first time in years the RIBA has a President who is a practising architect, is successful and influential'.[11] In addition to his other qualities Spence was seen as 'a little bit of a showman', something which the *AJ* felt would 'not come amiss in a president'.[12]

The RIBA had a great deal to do in repairing its image and the need to improve public relations was an issue about which Spence felt strongly.[13] Both journals noted his fluency as a speaker and *Prefabrication* felt that his 'constant approachability […] be it to journalist, visiting architects or students' would also give him a great deal of influence on design trends.[14]

The profession ‘in its somewhat embarrassing state’ required a great deal of its President and the *AJ* felt that Spence possessed all the necessary qualities:

> Basil Spence epitomises the phrase “the world is his oyster.” He has done more than most architects, and he has the energy, and the years, to do much more. His presidency is no political appointment. He is there by virtue of his work as an architect. He has risen fast, but we hope and trust that he knows the way to make a united, efficient, profession, and to make it rise fast too, and fully serve its fellow men.[15]

[10] *AJ,* 3 July 1958, p.2
[11] *Prefabrication,* July 1958, p.391
[12] *AJ,* 3 July 1958, p.2
[13] Improving public relations was a issue which Spence noted in his candidate's statement for election to Council in 1957: *AJ,* 16 May 1957, p.736
[14] *Prefabrication,* July 1958, p.391
[15] *AJ,* 3 July 1958, p.2; Spence was 50 when he became President, which made him considerably younger than his predecessors: Howard Robertson was 64 when he took office, his successor Charles Aslin was 61 and Kenneth Cross was 66.

They ended, nevertheless, with a note of caution: 'without doubt few presidents have faced a more difficult task'.[16]

It was indeed a difficult task. Towards the end of his presidency Spence would describe the ‘dear old lady of Portland Place [having] to pick up her skirts and run’ and ‘the sedate cup of tea […] being replaced by the stimulus of a large gin and tonic’.[17] Spence, however, faced the additional difficulty of having to maintain very busy practices in London and Edinburgh. As *Prefabrication* had noted, 'paradoxically […] his high reputation is founded on major projects that are as yet structurally incomplete. Most of his schemes, and there are many, are either in the design melting pot or are still being built'.[18] The *AJ* likewise commented that 'the bulk of his work - civic buildings and designs for seven universities – is still only under construction'.[19]

On the 17th June Spence was officially named as President and Barr and Williams were among those elected to Council.[20] Gibson was not on the new Council; having served six continuous years, he had not been eligible to stand again.[21] He had provided a great deal of support for Spence during the difficult early years of the Coventry Cathedral project and there seems to have been a great deal of mutual respect between the two men; in October 1957 Spence was one of Gibson’s sponsors in his application for Fellowship of the RIBA.[22] Although Gibson’s quiet, but firm and pragmatic voice was missing from the Council during the first difficult year of Spence’s presidency, he was able to

[16] *AJ,* 3 July 1958, p.2
[17] *AJ,* 21 January 1960, p.103
[18] *Prefabrication,* July 1958, p.391
[19] *AJ,* 3 July 1958, p.2
[20] *RIBAJ,* July 1958, p.289 Council meeting, 8 July 1958
[21] RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/2/200
[22] Spence wrote of Gibson in relation to the Cathedral project: ‘I can truly say that without his help we would not have even started. His position was extremely delicate but I could always rely on his help’: Spence (1962), p.86; RCAHMS MS 2329/x/7/1/450 membership list and elections 8 October 1957; Both men were also nominated for the 1958 Royal Gold Medal: RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/1/399 nomination list, 9 December 1957

serve on the Cost Research Committee, the Ad Hoc Committee on the representation of Salaried Architects and the Board of Architectural Education.[23]

The honorary officers provided significant support for the President, but their selection process was now complicated by the views expressed at the AGM. Spence could either follow the existing appointment procedure, or institute 'a clean sweep', choosing his officers from elected Council members.[24] After consultation with the Council the existing procedure was followed; Jefferiss Mathews was retained as Honorary Treasurer, Richard Sheppard became Honorary Secretary and Forshaw, Lionel Brett and Sheppard Fiddler were appointed as Vice Presidents.

Sheppard was a good friend of Spence and, as Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on the representation of salaried architects, possessed a wealth of knowledge and experience on which Spence could draw. The reappointment of Mathews was potentially controversial because he represented the undemocratic system which had been attacked at the AGM, but there seem to have been no objections; members probably realised that he would be unlikely to serve beyond the next Council elections.

In response to the resolution of the AGM, Spence's Council set up an eighteen-member Constitutional Committee which included Williams and Barr, who was appointed Chairman. The Committee was charged with examining ways of ensuring that the Council was made 'fully and democratically representative of the profession at large' and given a six months timetable to produce preliminary proposals for reform.[25]

Having selected his honorary officers it was essential for Spence to gain, and maintain, the confidence of the membership. Developing and implementing

[23] *RIBA Annual Report for the Year 1958-1959* (April 1959)
[24] RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/10/283 letter Spragg to Spence, 1 July 1958
[25] *A&BN,* 3 December 1958, p.736

the changes which they had demanded was going to be a protracted process and there was every chance that the confidence of the membership would further diminish if there were no visible signs that the Council had taken note of their concerns. The appointment of committees provided an opportunity for the Council to show its commitment to the process of change.

Glendinning attributes to Robert Matthew's presidency (1962-64) the implementation of 'a range of modernisation policies […] including an insistence on representation by official architects on all RIBA committees'.[26] In fact, instructions prepared for Spence's first session as President included the direction that 'a substantial proportion of members in salaried employment be appointed' to committees.[27] The committee lists show that out of 312 seats, 108 went to salaried members and at least one salaried architect was present on each committee.[28]

The difficult nature of the work which lay ahead for Spence was highlighted by a tongue-in-cheek letter in the *AJ* in July. The correspondent noted that the Journal's Editorial, commenting on the recent Council elections, expressed 'puzzlement at the general results, diagnoses lamentable indifference and admits that many of the profession may not think it worth while to vote in the circumstances now pertaining'.[29]

The Journal was, the writer believed, absolutely right. Once members had managed to shorten the long list of unknown candidates, using various curious selection methods, those that remained, if elected, would almost certainly 'be

[26]Glendinning (2008), p.310
[27]RCAHMS MS 2329//X/7/2/439 Appointment of committees 1958-59 session: Instruction 1c; Salaried members are marked with 'S' on the committee lists.
[28]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/2/493-514 committees 1958-59: salaried architects held 48% of the seats on the largest committee, for the International Union of Architects, and 45% of seats on the Town and Country Planning and Housing Committee; A letter from Leonard Howitt to Spence (RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/13/85 25 June 1959) suggests that Spence had a policy of putting younger architects onto the committees. Howitt wrote of Spence's 'viewpoint that the Committees are "nurseries" as far as non-Council-members are concerned'.
[29]*AJ,* 10 July 1958, p.43

able to do absolutely nothing which will in any way disturb the ruminations of that venerable Institute to which we owe so much'.[30] At the end of the day members had only two options when choosing candidates for Council: 'we can use a pin or […] throw the lot in the waste-paper basket. Me? I never seem to have a pin'.[31]

The sense of apathy, loss of confidence and the belief that nothing could be changed were very real problems. The fact that the writer was deeply disillusioned even when representatives as able and vocal as Barr and Williams had been elected to the Council shows how deeply rooted the issues were.

Reform of the Council and Executive was essential to restoring confidence, but administrative reform was also necessary. Among the full-time staff, the post of Secretary was central to the daily running of the Institute and provided a pivotal link between the President, Council, committees and the wider membership. The Secretary was therefore crucial to implementing the reform of the Institute's administrative structure.

Bill Spragg had held the position since 1943, having joined the staff in 1913. [32] He was the central figure in the administrative regime which had come under attack, but although Barr's motion of censure has been described as the action 'that led to the replacement of Spragg as Secretary', Spragg was in fact due to retire and left the RIBA in 1959 at the age of 65.[33] The conjunction of events was opportune and it gave an added impetus to the Council to consider the appointment of a younger and more progressive administrator who would

[30]*AJ,* 10 July 1958, p.43; the correspondent did not exaggerate the difficulties; excluding the representatives from the Allied Societies, forty-three candidates stood for the ten available Council seats in the 1958 elections: *RIBAJ,* July 1958, p.289
[31]*AJ,* 10 July 1958, p.43
[32]Cyril D Spragg (1894-1986), known as Bill, worked for the RIBA for 46 years, becoming Assistant Secretary in 1926 and Secretary in 1943
[33]Glendinning (2008), p.263;

be able to oversee administrative reorganisation as part of the overall reform of the Institute.

Consideration of the 'question of secretaryship' had begun long before the May AGM. At the first Council meeting of 1958, a committee of Honorary Officers was appointed to examine the issue and report on the procedure to be followed.[34] As a member of that committee, Spence played a central role in setting out the requirements for Spragg's replacement.

At the Council meeting on the 4th March it was announced that an advertisement for the post would be placed as soon as possible, and by June Spence was ‘wading through over 100 applications' and finding it 'extremely difficult to make any common-sense out of them'.[35] William Allen, Chief Architect to the BRS, wrote offering advice and suggested considering Gordon Ricketts, then RIBA Secretary for Professional Relations.[36] Spence replied 'Ricketts automatically goes on the short-list. He may well be our best bet'.[37]

In July the *AJ* Editorial asked what the role of the Secretary was. It pointed out that 'when architecture was an art practised by the few for the few, a secretary-administrator was all that was necessary. Now the needs are much more complex, as architecture becomes a social art'.[38] In order to remain at the head of the building team the profession had to 'improve its efficiency' and the Secretary had to be 'as intelligent, hard-working, and enterprising as the profession can afford'.[39]

[34]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/10/402 letter Spragg to Spence, 10 January 1958 Committee to meet on 21 January; MS 2329/X/7/10/377 further meeting of Committee on 5 February 1958
[35]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/2/213 Minutes of Council 4 March 1958, p.10; RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/13/154 letter Allen to Spence, 11 June 1958
[36]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/13/154 letter Allen to Spence, 11 June 1958
[37]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/13/255 letter Spence to Allen, 17 June 1958
[38]*AJ,* 3 July 1958, p.3
[39]Ibid.

The advertisement for the post attracted a high calibre of applicants, and a short list of nine was eventually drawn up.[40] Ricketts, with his inside knowledge of the Institute, took the opportunity in his application to list the issues he would focus on if appointed and, having astutely highlighted the major concerns facing the Council and the Institute, there seemed little question that he would get the job.[41]

The Interviews took place on the 29th July and two sheets of questions were prepared, with certain questions allocated to certain candidates.[42] Under the section 'Character & Tact', question 3 asked 'What do you think of Coventry Cathedral?'[43] The question was only asked of two candidates, one of whom was Ricketts which suggests that he was a favourite for the post.

Other questions under 'Character & tact' focussed on issues of particular importance to the Institute and its membership: 'The number of architects in salaried employment is about 55% of the total membership. Do you think this is inimical to the art of architecture?' and 'Approximately 55% of our members are in salaried positions in public and private offices. How would you expect their representation in the direction of policy to be arranged?'[44] Spence made various notes on the margins of his agenda sheet as the interviews proceeded; next to one name is written 'dull', against another 'smooth'.[45]

In November the *RIBAJ* announced that Ricketts had been appointed as the new Secretary.[46] Although he did not officially take up his post until July 1959, it appears that he immediately began work on the issue of administrative

[40]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/10/286 letter Spragg to Spence, 11 June 1958, short-listing to be done on 18 June 1958; MS 2329/X/7/13/281 list of applicants for Secretaryship
[41]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/12/23-24
[42]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/1/178,9 29 July 1958. Questions to be asked of applicants for the post of Secretary to the RIBA.
[43]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/1/1/178
[44]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/1/1/178
[45]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/2/591
[46]*RIBAJ,* November 1958, p.2

reform; the Report of the Finance and House Committee, published in December, noted that 'the review of the office organization […] has begun […] Mr Ricketts will require further time to complete his examination'.[47]

A major focus of Spence's presidency was improving public relations. His first major initiative in this direction was to hold a press conference after a Council meeting. The first of these conferences was held in October 1958 and the *RIBAJ* noted that this was:

> a new idea and will be a regular practice. As the president said in his introductory remarks the Institute has nothing to hide and these meetings will give an opportunity to the technical press to ask questions and to hear about the work of the council.[48]

PR work also included attending formal dinners and events and although these invitations balanced the more onerous tasks of the presidency, they became a very time consuming part of the job. Invitations began to arrive from the announcement of Spence's nomination in May and by Christmas over fifty had been received and all but a very small number were accepted.[49] Robert Matthew, who took on the presidency in 1962, apparently found this element of the President's domestic duties to be 'really boring', but Spence was in his element, both as the representative of the Institute and as its host.

On the 4th November 1958 Spence gave his inaugural address to the RIBA. Briefing notes were provided, but Spence took his own route and, although happier speaking 'off the cuff', he produced a wide ranging and carefully crafted speech intended to foster a greater sense of unity by highlighting the common values to be found in the older and younger generations, and in traditional and non-traditional design.[50]

[47] *A&BN,* 31 December 1958, p.881
[48] *RIBAJ,* November 1958, p.2
[49] RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/4/1-210
[50] RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/3/78-79 'Notes' dated 24 October 1958; RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/4/91-93: Spence was asked to provide a copy of notes for a speech to the British Society of Master Glass-Painters (letter 19 September 1958). Spence wrote back, 'I feel it may be a better speech if I spoke off the cuff […] I know that if one gets slightly worked up and enthusiastic it is usually

His emphasis was on the importance of architecture as a ‘servant of humanity’, but he opened, in typically direct and humorous style, with the problems besetting the Institute. It was, he said ‘the time of year when the President of the RIBA is allowed to speak as he wishes […] to throw a pebble in the pool: but in the stormy waters of the Institute something like a rock is necessary to make the appropriate splash’.[51] He had a few pebbles in his pocket and he would take courage from the story of David and Goliath.

There was hardly a need to refer to the ‘troubles which came to a head at the last and very historic Annual General Meeting, and the present lack of unity – the older generation looking with mistrust at the younger, with the plain knowledge that the younger generation of architects is revolting’.[52] The very specific use of the word 'revolting', rather than 'in revolt', once again brought directness and humour to a serious issue.[53] While Spence clearly viewed the problems as very much a generational divide, he saw great hope for the future in the younger architects, whom he found to be:

> remarkable in many ways – self-critical, critical of others, serious, thoughtful, hardworking, impatient of the lack of progress, misunderstood, completely lacking in respect for their elders, and devastatingly aware of what is happening in other parts of the world. It is in their hands that the future of British architecture rests.[54]

It was a clear statement that, while he understood the frustrations on both sides, the future had to be given to the younger generation and change must take place. Architecturally that change had to take account of, and build on, the best features of British architecture: mastery of scale; ‘quality of material and

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a better speech', (letter 8 October 1958); *RIBAJ,* December 1958, pp.46-50
[51]*RIBAJ* (December 1958), p.46
[52]Ibid., p.46
[53]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/10/129 A correction slip attached to a copy of the speech (28 October 1958) notes that the ‘last line of second paragraph should read ”...architects is revolting” not “in revolt”'.
[54]*RIBAJ* (December 1958), p.46

workmanship' and the dedication of 'buildings to the service of humans'.[55] There were, however, 'many formidable obstacles to good architecture'.[56]

Firstly, there was 'the menace of a client who knows a little and insists on telling the architect how to do his job'. This could only be overcome by education, using 'every available means possible to let the public know what architecture is about. We must step up our propaganda'.[57] The Institute had to fight a battle 'against public ignorance and apathy, and sometimes aggressive retrogression' to prevent ignorant clients negating even the work of the best architects.[58]

Then there was the second, and potentially more damaging, obstacle to good architecture: the planning process. Having expressed his understanding and sympathy with all sides of the profession, Spence tossed his 'last pebble' into the pond and, in a move which must have united the vast majority of his audience, attacked the planning committee.

He believed 'that if ever an objective of the lowest common denominator of ignorance and bad architecture had to be achieved, the planning committee precisely fits the bill'.[59] Design was suffering because the 'highly trained professional' had to submit to 'untrained lay judgement' and as a result young architects were producing mediocre, common-place designs just to 'get over the planning committee hurdle'.[60] In the interests of 'vitality', Spence called for the planning committee to be abolished for a trial period.

The vote of thanks was given by the Minister of Works, Hugh Molson, who praised Spence as 'an imaginative and progressive architect of great vitality' and as a President who would bring to office 'the same sort of imagination and

[55]*RIBAJ,* December 1958, p.46
[56]Ibid., p.46
[57]Ibid., p.48
[58]Ibid.
[59]Ibid.
[60]Ibid.

the analytical mind which has shown itself in the buildings he has produced'.[61] Molson refrained from commenting on the censure passed on planning committees, but commented that the architect had 'one great handicap' when compared with other artists:

> Whereas in the case of a disagreeable picture it is easy to destroy and nobody need go and look at it, when an architect has built a great building in a prominent place, then for a very long time everybody is obliged to be aware that it exists.[62]

He felt, therefore, that 'perhaps some measure of restraint upon them is needed because their works are so large and so difficult to destroy'.[63]

Molson and Spence appear to have had an initially cordial relationship. When Molson left his post as Minister of Works, Spence wrote 'I would like you to know how much I have appreciated your friendliness, kindness and co-operation to me during a very difficult period of office at the RIBA'.[64] Molson regretted 'that the happy co-operation between us two personally was not destined to last longer'.[65] Interestingly, it was Molson who eventually played a significant part in Spence's retreat from architecture and the public eye towards the end of his life. In 1972 Molson publicly attacked Spence and his proposals for the Queen Anne's Mansions site, London. The disagreement between the two men sadly descended into an irrevocable and very public war of words, which caused lasting acrimony on both sides.[66]

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[61] *RIBAJ* (December 1958), p.49
[62] Ibid., p.49
[63] Ibid.
[64] RCAHMS MS 2329/7/13/52 Letter Spence to Molson, 5 October 1959
[65] RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/13/51 Letter Molson to Spence, 24 November 1959
[66] In 1972, during a House of Lords debate on the Mansions proposals, Molson called on the Government to stop 'this monstrous new building' and said that Spence would 'go down in history as being the man who perpetrated the defacement not only of one of the Royal Parks, … but two' [http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1972/jul/04/queen-annes-mansions-site-development (accessed 21 February 2009)];Spence retaliated in an interview in *The Times*, 10 July 1972, p.14, saying that Molson would 'go down in history as the worst Minister of Works we have ever had and during his period of office they produced some of the worst buildings'. Molson replied (*The Times,* 18 July 1972, p.13) that Spence's criticism had 'some justification. I made a mistake when I entrusted to him the designing of the new Rome Embassy. At that time, however, the Cavalry Barracks in Hyde Park were not available as an object lesson. If they had been, he would not have got the job'.

The ‘last pebble’ of Spence’s inaugural address, regarding planning committees, certainly sent its ripples out through the architectural and planning world, generating a great deal of debate. He received letters of support, but also ‘raw retorts’ from some parts of the country.[67]

As the controversy over planning committees petered out, the opening of the first section of motorway in the country, the Preston By-pass, opened another debate. The RIBA had made formal requests to Government for architects to have a place on the regional study groups considering the issue of urban motorways; these had been refused by the Minister of Transport. At his press conference following the December's Council meeting, Spence 'uttered a strong warning' that motorways would have a 'disastrous effect' on British cities if the advice of architects was not taken.[68] Architects, he believed, 'should be called in at every stage' and the RIBA was going to go directly to the city authorities involved, to ask for architectural input into the regional study groups.[69]

His views opened up a debate in the letters columns of *The Guardian* which brought some praise, but also highlighted the suspicion with which the RIBA’s intentions were viewed by civil engineers. One writer believed that the correspondence revealed 'the trend of the architectural profession':[70]

> The architect grew from the artist-craftsman, but as building had become more complicated, and bow-ties more significant than wall-ties, so has he passed responsibility to consultants and called for “co-operation” from the contractor. Now the finger reaches for another pie.[71]

[67]RCAHMS MS/2329/X/7/13/207 letter dated 28 November 1958
[68]*Guardian,* 11 December 1958, p.5
[69]Ibid.
[70]*Guardian,* 30 December 1958, p.4
[71]Ibid.

Another correspondent stated that he 'would far rather employ an engineer who has the ability to sketch than an artist with a leaning towards three-dimensional expression'.[72]

The suspicion of the civil and structural engineers was only to be expected; throughout its history the RIBA had sought to ensure a clear separation between architects and the associated constructional professions, and had always promoted the architect as the ultimate leader of the design and building process. It was the control of architectural and planning matters by city and borough engineers and surveyors which had caused the deep divisions within the architectural profession and this was still a matter of contention between the RIBA, local authorities and the engineering and surveying professions.

Spence, however, was taking on these groups at an unusually difficult time. In 1957 the RIBA produced recommendations on the role of the architect under the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act and asked associated bodies to approve the report; they refused.[73] In September 1957 a meeting was held at Portland Place to reconsider the report, and the meeting provides a useful example of the RIBA's viewpoint on the superiority of the architect and his place with the local authority hierarchy.

The joint meeting included representatives from the Institution of Civil Engineers, the Institute of Municipal Engineers, the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, the Town Planning Institute and the RIBA.[74] Spence, Gibson and Percy Johnson-Marshall represented the Institute; Birmingham's City Engineer Herbert Manzoni represented the Civil Engineers.

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[72] *Guardian,* 2 January 1959, p.6
[73] RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/1/136 & 137 Minutes of RIBA Council 2 July 1957; Members of the Council pushed for publication of the Report anyway, but Kenneth Cross pointed out the dangers of doing so without agreement.
[74] RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/1/245

Gibson expressed the opinion that ‘all matters connected with the planning of a town down to such details as the designing of lamp posts was the job of the architect.’[75] Manzoni countered with the view that some non-architects were competent to exercise such judgements, but Spence supported Gibson saying that ‘only the architect, by virtue of his training was in a position to exercise this kind of judgement, and that attention to detail came only through intensive training’.[76] That view was not accepted by the other delegates and, as the RIBA Council was informed, 'the idea that architects should, by right, be regarded as leaders of the planning team was strongly challenged […] There was no general agreement even that the visual aspects were of over-riding importance'.[77] No agreement had been reached between the groups over the subsequent twelve months and now the architectural profession again appeared to be seeking a position of authority over the engineering professions, this time with regard to the road building programme.

The first six months of Spence's presidency had seen very positive moves towards bolstering the profession’s confidence and engendering a greater sense of unity and, apart from his thoughts on planning committees, he had made effective steps towards improving public relations.

The Constitutional Committee had also been considering the issue of reform and, in November 1958, Barr wrote to Spence regarding the difficulties he was facing. The phrasing of the report and the use of the word 'recommendations' rather than the lesser term 'thoughts', had upset some Council members, but Barr believed that changing the wording 'would be to vitiate the substance of the Report'.[78] The recommendation that differentiation in

[75]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/1/282 minutes dated 27/9/57
[76]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/1/282 minutes dated 27/9/57
[77]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/1/245
[78]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/13/204 letter Cleeve Barr to Spence, 26 November 1958

the make-up of the Council, according to class of membership, should end, had caused a problem with 'certain of the “old guard”' who 'waded into the attack’.[79] Barr felt he should have anticipated the problems, but had been unable to 'think quick enough to cope with the situation'.[80] Spence wrote back, rather cryptically, 'I hope that you will be able to recruit some support for my action as I have heard that strong complaints are going to be voiced'.[81] Whether he was referring to the issue of equality between Fellows and Associates is not clear, but this facet of the proposed reforms certainly seems to have been particularly problematic. The Interim Provisional Report of the Constitutional Committee was finally published early in December to allow time for consideration prior to the Special General Meeting in January 1959.[82]

The Committee provisionally recommended that the existing system of voting should be retained, as should the rule that members could serve no more that six consecutive years. They recommended, however, that all Council members should be elected by postal ballot, and that there should be no differentiation by class of membership, employment or occupation within the make-up of the Council.[83]

With regard to honorary officers, the Committee believed that the restriction of these posts to Fellows should end and that the Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer should only be appointed from among the elected members of the Council, or those who had been debarred from service having served six consecutive years.

Concerns about the representation of other bodies on the Council, through appointed members, had been raised by Anthony Cox at the May AGM. Having

[79]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/13/204 letter Cleeve Barr to Spence, 26 November 1958
[80]Ibid.
[81]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/13/203 letter Spence to Cleeve Barr, 28 November 1958
[82]*RIBAJ,* December 1958, pp.40-45
[83]*A&BN,* 3 December 1958, pp.736

considered the matter, the Committee recommended that the Council should consist purely of elected members and that only the AA should retain an appointed representative.[84] *Ex officio* members were likewise considered and it was decided that only the Chairs of the Board of Architectural Education and the Registration Committee should retain their seats.[85]

These reforms removed the opportunities for 'nepotism' and 'old-boy-ism', which had existed, but they also removed from the Council the three representatives of the public and salaried sector.[86] Under the proposals neither the appointee of the ABT, nor the two *ex officio* representatives for the Salaried and Official Architects' Committee would retain their seats. It was felt that while the representation of both groups had started 'at a time when no machinery whatever existed for the representation in the RIBA of the interests of members in salaried employment' […] the position has now changed completely'.[87] There must have been a realisation that this particular reform would prove contentious.

On January 6th 1959, with Spence in the Chair, members met to consider the reports of the Finance and House Committee and the Constitutional Committee.[88] The mood of the assembly was very different to that of the May AGM and, in what seems to have been an unusual move, the entire hall stood as Spence entered.[89]

Despite the respect shown to Spence, he kept a very tight rein on the meeting. Members learned that the controversial rise in membership and examination fees would remain in force, despite the improved financial position

[84]Ibid., p.737: The AA had been represented on the Council since 1884 and it was felt that on 'special arguments of sentiment as well as practical grounds' the link should be maintained.
[85]Ibid., p.737-738
[86]*AJ,* 1 May 1958, p.642
[87]*A&BN,* 3 December 1958, p.737
[88]*RIBAJ,* February 1959, pp.114-123
[89]Bill Allen suggested to Spence that this should become general practice at the Institute's meetings: RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/13/136 letter 23 February 1959

of the Institute, Spence then asked that members 'pass on to the real 'meat' of the meeting'.[90]

Barr admitted coming before the members with 'with some humility'; there was 'a great difference between standing there in the rostrum and criticising, as I did at the AGM, and standing here as the Chairman of the Constitutional Committee'.[91] The report he felt 'may smack of compromise', but the Committee had tried to 'avoid sharpening the antagonisms which exist between the provinces and London'.[92] They had also been anxious not to present majority and minority reports, but rather one document which was generally acceptable.[93] It was hoped that the final proposals would take full effect for the 1961 Council elections.

Taking the proposals in groups, discussion was followed by a show of hands to gauge general opinion: most of the recommendations were passed unanimously or by a sizeable majority.[94] The only show of dissent came in a majority vote against the Chairmen of the Registration Committee and the Board of Architectural Education retaining their Council seats as *ex officio* members.[95]

The proposal that the AA representative should retain his place on the Council, while the ABT representative did not, was contested from the floor by Kenneth Campbell who argued that the loss of the ABT seat would remove representation for the 'lower-grade architectural assistant' because, despite changes in the composition of the Council, it's salaried members still tended to be 'a very much higher type than the ordinary architectural assistant'.[96] The

[90] *RIBAJ,* February 1959, p.117
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.
[94] *RIBAJ,* February 1959, p.117-123
[95] Ibid., p.123
[96] Ibid., p.122

ABT also had valuable experience to bring to the Council in terms of trades union negotiations and provided an opportunity for the RIBA to raise ‘a professional voice’ at the Trades Union Congress.[97] Campbell concluded that the Association should retain its seat on the Council above that of the AA, but if the decision was taken to remove all nominated representatives then the ABT ‘could not contest the decision’.[98]

A case was then put forward for salaried architects to be represented by the newly formed Local Government Architects' Assocaition, but Thurston Williams, speaking as Chairman of its Provisional Executive Committee, said that the Society was not recommending special representation on the Council. While they believed that representation for salaried architects should increase, they hoped that it could be achieved through the 'normal constitution of the Institute', and representation should be for salaried architects as a whole rather than for a particular organisation.[99]

When Spence eventually called for a show of hands, a large majority favoured neither the AA nor the ABT having special representation. The discontinuation of the *ex officio* seats for the Salaried and Official Architects' Committee was approved 'without dissent'.[100] The opinions expressed at the meeting were then taken back to the Constitutional Committee for further consideration.

Spence’s energetic and often innovative approach to the office of President had been very evident during his first months of office. It was underlined again in January 1959, when he broke with precedent and announced he would not be having the traditional Presidential portrait painted.

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[97] *RIBAJ,* February 1959, p.122
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid., p.123
[100] Ibid.

Instead the sculptor Jacob Epstein would produce a bronze bust at no additional cost.[101] It was utterly fitting that a man who had turned from sculpture to architecture as a student should take that route, and Spence would later joke that at least the Institute could 'get a little bit for it, if they flog it'.[102]

The change in the direction and energy of the presidency brought praise from Percy Johnson Marshall, who felt that if Spence's presidency was 'going to herald the long awaited Renaissance' as Marshall believed 'it is doing and must do', there was a need for architects to 'push out, in terms of new ideas, in all directions'.[103] It was certainly a sentiment which Spence shared.

The traditional presentation of studentships and prizes took place at the Institute in February and Spence used the opportunity to reiterate and reinforce the views he had expressed in his Inaugural Address, exhorting his audience to have a personal belief in what they were doing and show 'no hesitation':

> Dedicate yourselves with belief, because I believe that in every one of you rests seeds of the British genius, in varying degrees of course, the seed of quality, of scale, of appreciation of material, and of humanity. Nurture it, do not be apologetic, allow it to grow, be proud of it, it is your heritage. [104]

For those students in the audience who attended the Bartlett, University College London, the emphasis which Spence placed on personal belief, determination and pride, would have had a particular resonance. There was a great deal of discontent within the School concerning its curriculum and its unwavering adherence to Beaux-Arts principles. Students had written to the Board of Architectural Education and organised a petition to express their

[101]*RIBAJ,* February 1959; Spence's successors, William Holford (President 1960-62) and Robert Matthew (President 1962-64) followed Spence's example and had official busts rather than portraits.
[102]RIBA Library, Spence Biographical file, unsourced, undated press cutting, interview by Diana McConomy, 'The man who did Coventry'
[103]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/13/184 letter dated 11 January 1959
[104]RCAHMS MS/2329/X/7/3/69-73

concerns and their misgivings had been shared by the Visiting Board when it inspected the school in November 1958.[105]

The Board's report was damning; the curriculum needed 'complete reappraisal' and 'the general standard of work must be raised'.[106] If steps towards re-modelling had not begun by the end of the 1959-60 session then the School's recognition for exemption from RIBA examinations would be withdrawn. It was a potentially disastrous situation and the Provost of UCL, Ifor Evans, wrote to Spence, in February 1959, asking for his help to avoid an open dispute between the college, the University and the RIBA.[107]

That a school of architecture, particularly one with the Bartlett's long history, should face losing its recognised status was very troubling. The fact that Spence had studied there during his time in Lutyens's office must have made the issue a matter of personal concern.

The imminent retirement of the School's Professor of Architecture, Hector Corfiato, made the problem a particularly sensitive one which required very diplomatic handling. The Chairman of the Visiting Board sent a report to Spence detailing the School's problems and Spence met with the Provost to gain his assurance that the necessary reforms would begin in the immediate future.[108] With that assurance the matter was then dealt with without reference to either the RIBA Council or the Board of Architectural Education and without undue embarrassment for Corfiato.[109] Spence's delicate handling of the matter and the appointment of Richard Llewelyn Davies as Professor Designate eventually averted the crisis.

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[105]Crinson & Lubbock (1994), pp.135-6; RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/13/140 letter from Secretary of the Visiting Board to the Provost of University College London, 11 February 1958
[106]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/13/140 letter dated 11 February 1959.
[107]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/13/141 letter dated 23 February 1959
[108]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/13/138-9
[109]Ibid.

In addition to his onerous presidential duties Spence and his wife were now preparing for an official tour of associated Commonwealth societies.[110] In keeping with his keen eye for publicity, Spence contacted the Institute's PR department:

> I think it would be a very good thing if a notice appeared in the social columns of say, 'The Times' and 'The Telegraph' saying that the President of the RIBA is leaving for a tour of Africa. I have noticed that the Lawyers and other Professions do this, and I thought it would be good if we followed suit.[111]

On the 4th March *The Times* Court Circular duly noted that the President and Secretary of the RIBA were leaving for a tour in Africa.[112] The itinerary for the five week tour was punishing: from London to Khartoum, on to Uganda, Kenya, Zambia and Rhodesia, a week in South Africa, then Ghana to end their tour.[113] Spence returned to Britain on the 13th April and on the 15th was back at work giving a press conference to re-launch the RIBA's campaign for architectural involvement in the planning and construction of new motorways.[114]

Once again he called for architectural advice to be taken from the very start of new projects to ensure that new motorways did not 'destroy the appearance of the town completely, stabbing like a sword into their very heart'.[115] The campaign continued to draw disagreement from civil engineers and, at the end of April, it was noted in Parliament that the RIBA had not received a good response to its request for an architectural input into study groups in the West Midlands and the West Riding.[116]

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[110] Tours of the Commonwealth Allied Societies had been undertaken by previous Presidents: Graham Henderson visited Canada and the USA in 1951 and Kenneth Cross visited Australia and New Zealand in 1957: *RIBAJ,* July 1959, p.303
[111]RCAHMS MS/2329/X/7/8/90 letter dated 27 March 1959
[112]*The Times,* 4 March 1959, p.12
[113]RCAHMS MS 2329/7/11/143-152 African diary. The itinerary lists only one day free of official engagements.
[114]*The Times,* 16 April 1959, p.8
[115]Ibid.
[116]*The Times,* 30 April 1959, p.14

Within the Institute, consideration of constitutional reform was continuing, as was Ricketts's examination of the administrative structure and associated committee organisation. In May proposals for a new committee structure were put before the Executive Committee and Ricketts wrote to Spence the following day to thank him for his help; the brief letter gives an indication of Spence's approach to getting complex or contentious issues through committee.

Ricketts thanked him for his 'helpful criticism and imaginative guidance in steering the paper on committee structure through the executive', and then added that it had been 'best to go boldly for complete acceptance, as you did yesterday'.[117] The phrase suggests a forceful attitude to the meeting, and this certainly accords with descriptions of Spence's general approach to that side of the presidency. Sir Hugh Casson believed that Spence had been 'impatient' and 'insensitive' in Council, and had failed to understand that 'you have to behave so people go along with you'.[118] Sheppard recalled 'explosions in the Council Chamber and elsewhere' and the fact that 'there was always a sense of drama, tension and excitement'.[119] Gibberd noted Spence's tendency to speak out 'not always with the greatest discretion'.[120]

Some of this comes through in the published reports of Council meetings. Spence's last AGM as President is a particular example and, although certain members of the audience seemed intent on causing disagreement, Spence's approach did not help the meeting.[121] The Annual Report had not been delivered to members on the required date and Spence was met with an immediate challenge as to its legality under the bye-laws. A sharp exchange

[117]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/11/134 letter dated 27 May 1959
[118]Hugh Casson, 'The day Sir basil fainted', obituary, *Observer,* 21 November 1976; Sir Hugh Casson interviewed by Bruce Youell, 7 November 1979, notes courtesy of Brian Edwards
[119]Richard Sheppard, Spence obituary, *RIBAJ,* January 1977, pp.40-41
[120]Frederick Gibberd, Spence obituary, *AR,* April 1977, p.254
[121]*RIBAJ,* June 1960, pp.296-305

ended with him admitting that he did not think the Report was in compliance, and asking whether this mattered. The questioner called Spence's response 'the most deplorable statement from a member of this learned society'.[122]

Spence was then accused of asking members to break their signed undertakings to obey all the RIBA bye-laws.[123] His response was withering: 'I am sorry I should ask you to stretch your conscience to that extent'.[124] Despite the Secretary's eventual resolution of what should have been a relatively minor issue, the undercurrent of antagonism remained throughout the meeting.

Spence could be 'busy self absorbed and impatient', but he was responsible for overseeing the formulation, agreement and implementation of several major reforms in a very short space of time.[125] He could not afford the luxury of protracted debate over proposals which had already gone through detailed discussion before reaching Council. His single-mindedness also removed opportunities for open division and dispute and provided, in public at least, an appearance of unity within the profession.

The mid-point of Spence's term of office was marked by the retirement of Bill Spragg and the welcoming of Ricketts as the new Secretary. [126] It was a very visible stage in the transition of the Institute from the old order to the new. As Spence began his second year as President, Gibson returned to the Council as an elected Fellow and he and Sir Hugh Casson were appointed vice-presidents.[127] Sheppard was re-appointed Honorary Secretary, but Hubert Bennett became Honorary Treasurer following Jefferiss Mathews' failure, once again, to be elected to Council.[128]

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[122]*RIBAJ,* June 1960, p.296
[123] Ibid.
[124]Ibid.
[125]Richard Sheppard, Spence obituary, *RIBAJ,* January 1977, p.40
[126]*RIBAJ,* August 1959, p.342
[127]*RIBAJ,* July 1959, p.301
[128]*RIBAJ,* August 1959, p.337; Jackson (1970), p.199

Ricketts's input into the reorganisation of the administration had been considerable and the proposals for the new committee structure, which Spence had 'boldly' taken through the Executive in May, were finally agreed and published in November.[129] In *Modern Architect*, Glendinning writes that:

> the most fundamental of Matthew's reform efforts at the RIBA was concerned with the internal organisation of the Institute's staff, where he and Holford together remodelled the administration on civil service lines, with departments headed by under-secretaries replacing the old learned society pattern'.[130]

While Matthew and Holford may have fully implemented the reforms, the recasting of the administration 'on civil service lines' was set out by Ricketts and pushed through Committee by Spence, prior to either Holford or Matthew taking office.

Ricketts's report on the new administrative structure stated that the aim of the reorganisation was to 'start with an economical machine stripped of inessentials'.[131] To this end, various activities in the Institute were grouped into departments, each with their own secretary; a move intended to 'mark out clearly the different spheres of responsibility' of the Institute.[132]

The Executive was to be replaced by a Policy Committee and, whereas the work of the Executive had closely followed that of the Council leading to a duplication of time, administration and paperwork, the new Policy Committee would be a 'stock-taking and thus a policy-thinking committee'.[133] It was intended that the Committee would 'concern itself with the overall policy questions: "Where are we heading? What is going by default? What challenges lie around the corner?"'[134] It would appear that this reorganisation started prior

[129]*RIBAJ,* November 1959, pp.19-23
[130]Glendinning (2008), p.310
[131]*RIBAJ,* November 1959, p.22
[132]Ibid., p.22
[133]*RIBAJ,* November 1959, p.19
[134]Ibid., p.19; Gibson was a member of the new Policy Committee, along with Cleeve Barr, Robert Matthew, Denis Clarke Hall, Frederick Gibberd, the President, Honorary officers and the Chairman of the Allied Societies Conference.

to the Report's publication; in October 1959 Spence wrote to Spragg and mentioned the difficulties encountered at the previous Council meeting, problems which he believed were due to the fact that 'the last Council was, of course, an experimental one without the sieve of the Executive'.[135]

The reforms grouped press, public relations and external relations with the Allied Societies within the Information Services Department. A senior secretary would be appointed who would focus on strengthening links between the RIBA and the Allied Societies. As soon as finances allowed, a full-time Allied Societies' Secretary would be appointed who, with an assistant, would also cover Overseas Societies. It was hoped that these two men would effectively also become talent scouts, spotting 'new, and particularly young, talent for RIBA committees'.[136]

The Economic Research Department would provide statistics for other departments and committees and would maintain an ongoing survey of the structure of the profession and the volume and proportion of work being carried out by architects.[137] The 'science' work of the Institute was considered to have 'assumed such importance' that it now had three standing committees grouped under the new Technical Department.[138]

The Salaried and Official Architects Committee would merge with the 'salaried element' of Richard Sheppard's Ad Hoc Committee to become the Professional Relations Committee, and it would join the other related committees within the new Practice Department.[139]

In the immediate wake of the Institute's financial crisis the *AJ* had written disparagingly, and perhaps a little unfairly, of the RIBA's administration as an

[135]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/13/64 letter Spence to Bill Spragg, 30 October 1959
[136]*RIBAJ,* November 1959, p.19
[137]Ibid., p.20
[138]Ibid.
[139]Ibid.

‘amateur show’, dependent on ‘spare-time advice’, a secretariat ‘untrained in certain essentials’ and ‘cruelly handicapped when it attempts to deal with the more exacting conditions of today’. [140] Members had accused the Council of ‘remarkable […] complacency’ and ‘a failure to appreciate the needs of the profession’.[141]

Now, less than two years after that low point, those criticisms had been addressed and the ‘professional administration’ which the Journal had called for was ready for implementation. The broad principles followed, in arriving at the new administrative structure, were published along with the proposals and they highlight how anxious the Institute was to prove that it was up-to-date, responsive, communicative and in touch with the needs of the profession.

The Institute had to be ‘geared […] for the quickest executive action consistent with full democratic discussion’ and this need for ‘flexibility and prompt action’ meant a ‘minimum of standing committees; […] a minimum of formal sieves, checks and double-checks […] and, inevitably some risk of occasional mistakes’. It was assumed that as formal committees were reduced in number there would be ‘a corresponding increase in informal discussions and debate between individuals’ and committee members would be expected ‘to go well beyond their own membership and sound informed opinion among responsible members’.[142]

These principles were clear within the new departmental structure, and the stated aims of changes to committee organisation presented the Institute as a progressive and proactive body which was looking out to its wider membership and also looking towards the future. Although reform of the administration relied

[140] *AJ,* 27 February 1958, p.308
[141] *AJ,* 1 May 1958, p.642
[142] *RIBAJ,* November 1958, p.22

on the input and advice of a great many people, Spence's presidential style, his vigour and impatience, may be detected in the principles followed.

On 3rd November, Spence gave his second Presidential Address and, while the Institute and its membership were no longer in open conflict with one another, the RIBA faced a demonstration by members of the 'Anti-Ugly Action' group.

The group, formed in 1958 by students of the stained glass department of the Royal College of Art, demonstrated against buildings which they believed to be of poor architectural quality.[143] Now they took their protests to the 'stick-in-the-mud RIBA', and demonstrated outside Portland Place, distributing a manifesto to those arriving for the evening meeting. [144]

Spence had been warned about the demonstration by the Director of the College, Robin Darwin, who wrote to apologise for the students' behaviour. They were, he said, 'involving themselves in the politics of a profession of which they know nothing and demonstrating against an idea rather than a building'. 'I am really very sorry', Darwin wrote by hand at the bottom of the letter.[145]

The incident was particularly embarrassing because of the connection which the Stained Glass Department had with Spence, through the commission for the design and production of the Nave windows for Coventry Cathedral. As Darwin pointed out in a letter to the Chairman of the Anti-Ugly group, Kenneth Baynes, they had chosen an occasion when their protests:

> would be necessarily taken as an insult to the President in his own person and also to a particular architect of some quality. […] he has commissioned from students and others connected with this College more work than probably any individual in the country, a fact of which as a member of the Department of Stained Glass, you can hardly be ignorant.[146]

[143] *AJ,* 21 January 1960, p.104
[144] Ibid., p.104
[145] RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/13/62 Letter dated 3 November 1959

They were ‘guilty not only of great ineptitude but gross ill-manners’ and their behaviour had been ‘singularly maladroit and juvenile’.[147]

While ‘ineptitude’ certainly referred to their indirect attack on Spence, there was also a certain ineptitude in the formulation of their manifesto; much of which took no account of the major reforms which had been taking place at the Institute during Spence’s presidency, and much of which highlighted issues which the profession itself was voicing. Statements such as ‘The RIBA in its present form is out of date’; ‘the Royal Charter is a drag on reform‘; ‘the RIBA is run by a clique’ were no longer valid, and the profession was well aware that it ‘must act as a group’; ‘must lead the building team’ and that ‘architects must assert themselves as specialists’.[148] Spence wrote to Darwin that he had ‘read their manifesto with interest – it is exactly what we are trying to do at the RIBA’.[149]

Having passed through the Anti-Ugly demonstration outside Portland Place, visitors settled to listen to the President’s Address. It was a less impassioned presentation than the previous year and there was no need this time for Spence to ‘throw pebbles in pools’, although he did, perhaps inadvertently. Nor was there the same imperative to give a unifying pep talk to the British architectural profession.

Spence began with the profession’s perennial struggle to gain the ‘correct recognition of the Architect’s status’, then turned to the subject of unity, discussing unity with the overseas membership and unity with the wider building and construction industry.[150]

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[146]Gavin Stamp, ‘Anti-Ugly Action’, *Blueprint*, January 2007, p.62 – letter illustrated, dated 4 November 1959
[147]Ibid., p.62
[148]*AJ,* 12 November 1959, pp.490-91
[149]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/13/61 Letter dated 5 November 1959.
[150]*RIBAJ,* December 1959, p.36

The RIBA campaign for architectural involvement in new road building projects had had little success. Spence now used the coincidence of his Address with the opening of the first stretch of the M1, to reopen the debate.[151] The Institute had been viewed with suspicion by the civil engineering profession, who saw it as trying to encroach on their territory. Spence now admitted that there had been a 'serious misunderstanding' between the two groups, but assured the audience that the intention had been for the architectural profession to 'express an opinion – that is all'.[152]

In a move away from his declaration that architects 'should be called in at every stage', Spence admitted that the architect could not contribute much in the planning of motorway routes.[153] The profession could, nevertheless, play a very positive role in the design of bridges and could also help 'where the motor road hits the city and infuses into it'.[154] He believed that such areas presented an opportunity for urban renewal and created 'great opportunities to make our cities safer, better places to live in and much more beautiful'.[155] This, he hoped, would be 'the field of our future collaboration'.[156]

Spence did not suggest, however, the simple involvement of architects in individual projects, but an officially constituted 'higher council composed of the Presidents and Secretaries of the Civil Engineers, the Structurals, the Town Planning Institute, the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors and the Institute of Landscape Architects' and the RIBA.[157] The objective of the council would be 'to make Britain a better place to live in and to control the motor car and not let

[151]The St Albans to Birmingham section of the M1 was officially opened by the Minister for Transport Ernest Marples on 2nd November 1959.
[152]*RIBAJ,* December 1959, p.36
[153]*Guardian,* 11 December 1958, p.5
[154]*RIBAJ,* December 1959, p.36
[155]Ibid.
[156]Ibid., p.37
[157]Ibid.

it control us' and it could offer advice to Government Ministries if asked to do so.[158]

The idea was, in essence, a logical one which Spence hoped would help in 'eliminating much of the friction which exists today'.[159] Instead, as Gibberd noted in his obituary for Spence, this particular 'off the cuff' idea was viewed with 'the greatest suspicion' by those Spence sought to include and it took 'all the skilled diplomacy of his successor, Lord Holford, to persuade them that it was not a take-over bid'.[160]

1960 opened with Spence being named as one of Astragal's 'Men of the Year', in the January edition of the *AJ*.[161] It was a fitting start to his final six months as President and he was selected for 'combining one of the busiest practices in Britain with energetic and outspoken leadership of the RIBA in its critical years, and for presiding with benign dignity over its proceedings'. Next in Astragal's list was the Anti-Ugly Action group which earned its place for 'cocking several snooks against ugliness in architecture'.[162]

In his interview Spence mentioned the important issues that the Institute was dealing with, including the new constitution, motorways, the Oxford Conference and collaboration with sister institutions and overseas members.[163] He chose, however, to focus on the 'misconception that the Council can direct matters of taste in design'; a focus probably chosen because of the presence of the Anti-Ugly Action Group among Astragal's Men of the Year. Spence was convinced that the Council was 'not empowered' to pronounce on 'matters of taste in architectural design', either to praise or to condemn. As 'a democratic instrument', one of the Council's 'greatest trusts' was 'the freedom of the

[158] *RIBAJ,* December 1959, p.37
[159] Ibid.
[160] *AR,* April 1977, p.254
[161] *AJ,* 21 January 1960, p.102
[162] Ibid., p.104
[163] Ibid., p.102

individual in matters of design'. Only in that freedom could architecture 'develop and flourish'.[164]

The Chairman of the Anti-Ugly Action Group, Ken Baynes, spoke of their surprise that of all their actions it had been their attack on the RIBA which had been 'most unfavourably received'. People had called them 'unrealistic and old-fashioned' and had told them to 'look at what the RIBA is doing'.[165] They had met with the President who had 'kindly' told them that 'we *are* doing something', however, they remained unconvinced'.[166]

In February Spence set another precedent at the annual presentation of student prizes when he declined to make the customary address to the students, as he felt 'strongly that this procedure is outmoded, it is out of date'.[167] Having gone to the RIBA as a student 'just to hear what the old josser had to say', he believed now that 'the old josser should open his ears' and listen to the students.[168]

In May proposals were finalised for the last major change that would be accomplished during his presidency: the radical overhaul of the *RIBA Journal*.[169] It was decided that there would be a leading article each month and that policy statements should appear as leading articles. The intention was that 'by focussing attention in this way, it will communicate a stronger sense of leadership stemming from Portland Place'.[170] In addition there would be a new look to the journal with a different paper being used and a new cover design.

As the end of Spence's period of office approached, there was no diminution in his schedule of work and official engagements. In March he had

[164]Ibid.
[165]Ibid., p.106
[166]Ibid.
[167]*RIBAJ,* April 1960, p.203
[168]Ibid.
[169]*RIBAJ* (March 1960), p.150 Malcolm MacEwen was appointed Chief Information Officer and took up his post in April 1960.
[170]*RIBAJ* (May 1960), p.225

been elected to succeed the late Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, as President of the Building Centre.[171] Now the RIBA Council began discussions about Spence's own successor as President of the Institute. On 19th April it was announced in *The Times* that Professor Sir William Holford had been nominated for the presidency and three days later the paper carried the announcement that Spence had been elected as a Royal Academician.[172]

The accolades continued. Spence travelled to Canada at the end of May to receive the Medallion of Honorary Fellowship at the Annual Assembly of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada[173] Seven days after the presentation, the Queen's Birthday Honours List was published and Spence was named among the Knights Bachelor.[174]

One of Spence's last major duties was to officiate at the annual RIBA Conference, which opened in Manchester on the 17th June.[175] The theme of the conference was 'Rebuilding our Cities' and Spence used the opportunity to press the case for comprehensive rebuilding plans and to launch an impassioned attack on land speculators. Society, he said, had 'inherited […] a sordid legacy of slums, industrial wasteland and drab subtopian waste' and cities were 'desperately wasteful and inefficient'.[176] The only solution was to end piecemeal development and to implement instead comprehensive design plans.[177]

Standing in the way of such an approach were the land speculators, treating the land as a 'casino' and 'like the profiteers who corner the bread

[171] *The Times,* 5 March 1960, p.3
[172] *The Times,* 19 April 1960, p.5; *The Times,* 22 April 1960, p.14
[173] *The Times,* 27 May 1960, p.16; *RIBAJ,* August 1960, p.363
[174] *The Times,* 11 June 1960, p.3
[175] *The Times,* 17 June 1960, p.6
[176] RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/3/63-67
[177] Ibid.

supply in a besieged city […] cornering the limited supply of building land in town and country and holding the community up to ransom'.[178] I

The speech was well received and clearly made an impression; three years later Spence was contacted by the Labour Party Film Unit for permission to use his 'particularly authoritative assessment of the situation' in a film considering the value of land and how it affected town planning.[179] Spence gave his agreement to its use, but was to busy to be filmed saying it.[180]

The success of the Manchester Conference was followed by Spence's last Council meeting as President at which the Final Report of the Constitutional Committee was approved.[181] The final recommendations were that the Council would in future consist of three elected officers - the President and two Past Presidents; three *ex officio* officers - two Vice-presidents and the Chair of the Board of Education; thirty-three nationally elected members; thirty-three regionally elected members; five representatives for Allied Societies overseas; two further Vice-Presidents and the Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer.[182] There would no longer be any stipulations as to a required class of membership for Council nominees.

These recommendations met the concerns and demands which had been raised at the May AGM in 1958 and also took into account the thoughts of the Special General Meeting in January 1959. As a result, while the representative of the ABT no longer had an *ex officio* seat on the Council, neither did the Chair of the Registration Committee and the representative of the AA.[183]

The *AJ* Editorial discussed the changes under the heading 'Nearly Democratic', and expressed satisfaction with Barr's 'painstaking and

[178]Ibid.
[179]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/19/16/195 letter from Maurice Hatton, 21 August 1963
[180]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/19/16/197
[181]*RIBAJ,* July 1960, pp.319-326 Council meeting on June 21st 1960
[182]*RIBAJ,* July 1960, p.322
[183]*RIBAJ,* July 1960, p.322

determined chairmanship' of the Committee. The results were 'largely a triumph for common sense'.[184] The changes in the mechanisms for calling for a special general meeting or a referendum were an improvement and the likelihood of a 'clique running the RIBA' had been diminished. Changes in the voting systems for Allied Societies had injected a 'welcome blast of democracy […] into the provinces'.[185] There was a, however, concern as to whether the interests of the salaried sector would 'be as well safeguarded' in the absence of the ABT representative, and disappointment that the Committee had failed to see the advantages of proportional representation.

The greatest concern was the loss of the AA seat and the issue of representation for London and Middlesex architects. Having no Allied Society, this group of architects were only entitled to one national vote, while others could vote nationally and regionally. In the absence of an Allied Society representative, London architects had always seen the AA President on the Council as representing their interests. The *AJ* deemed the removal of that place to be 'an appalling, monstrous action'.[186]

Despite the mixed reception from the *AJ,* the acceptance of the Committee's Final Report was a triumphant conclusion to two difficult years, both for the Committee and for Spence. It would in itself have been a fitting conclusion to his presidency, but in the few remaining days before he handed over to Holford, it was announced that he had been appointed a Royal Designer for Industry by the Royal Society of Arts and, on the 25th June, he attended the unveiling of Epstein's 'St Michael and the Devil' at Coventry Cathedral.[187]

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[184] *AJ,* 30 June 1960, p.981
[185] Ibid.
[186] Ibid.
[187] *The Times,* 24 June 1960, p.16; *The Times,* 25 June 1960, p.6

8.1c. An assessment of Spence's presidency.

When Spence was awarded the Order of Merit in 1962, the architectural correspondent for *The Guardian* wrote that Spence's presidency had marked a turning point for the profession. His 'genial personality enabled him to raise his voice demandingly, persuasively, aggressively in the cause of a better environment nearly every day of his two years in office'.[1] The correspondent believed that 'Sir Basil's greatest achievement to date has been to build the self-confidence of his profession and to lend its image a touch of his own good cheer'.[2]

It was a succinct and accurate assessment. Spence had taken on the presidency at critical time for architecture. The RIBA had appeared, to members and public alike, remote, secretive and disconnected from the realities of life. After a long period of relative inertia, the point had been reached where many of the Institute's members could see no way of achieving change and therefore little point in trying to achieve it.

Financial difficulties had provided the catalyst which finally triggered an overwhelming response against the Institute and began the irrevocable process of change. Through the early months of 1958 it must have become increasingly obvious to those at the head of the RIBA that major changes were going to be forced through by members, and these would need to be put in place as quickly as possible to avoid further loss of confidence. The next President would therefore need the vigour, will and tenacity to push through the reforms, the ability to inspire confidence in the membership and the panache and enthusiasm to take architecture out to the man in the street and to recast the

[1] *Guardian,* 23 November 1962
[2] Ibid.

profession in the eyes of the public and the wider building professions. Spence clearly possessed all those qualities.

Not everyone took that view; Richard Sheppard noted in Spence's obituary, that there had been moves within the Council to elect a 'non-entity' because Spence might cause upset.[3] Spence was certainly not in the mould of previous Presidents; his obituary in *The Times* said that 'his election came at a time when the Institute […] had been presided over by a succession of mediocre figures' and Frederick Gibberd wrote that 'he succeeded a run of worthy presidents conspicuous for devotion to the profession and indifference to architecture'.[4]

Spence was certainly not mediocre, nor could he ever have been described as being indifferent to architecture. Sheppard believed that he took on the role of President because he felt that the RIBA should carry architecture to the world at large.[5] He had a natural ability to make 'architecture important and absorbing' and was 'vivid, persuasive, even eloquent and had style and panache'.[6] As an ambassador for architecture he had few equals. He was described as a man of 'wisdom, tact and personal charm' and 'genial personality'.[7] Nevertheless, the unease over his nomination was well founded; as Sheppard noted, Spence did cause upset and 'this made his reign – the word is exact – both memorable for the RIBA and important for architecture'.[8] He 'became personally and emotionally involved and this made enemies for him in the profession and explosions in the Council Chamber and elsewhere'.[9] While Sheppard found Spence's style of presidency 'the most adventurous and

[3]Ibid., p.40
[4]*The Times,* 20 November 1976, p.14; *AR,* April 1976, p.254
[5]Richard Sheppard, Spence obituary, *RIBAJ,* January 1977, p.40
[6]*RIBAJ,* January 1977, p.40
[7]RCAHMS MS 2329/X/7/13/85 Letter from Leonard Howitt to Spence, 25 June 1959; *Guardian,* 23 November 1962
[8]*RIBAJ,* January 1977, p.40
[9]Ibid.

inspiring I can remember' and seemed to enjoy the 'sense of drama, tension and excitement', Sir Hugh Casson took a different view.[10]

Casson, a friend of Spence, believed that he had done a very good public relations job for the RIBA, but felt that his presidency was poor.[11] He did not delegate or co-edit and had upset the committee by knowing what he wanted rather than taking them along with his ideas.[12] Spence's impatience and insensitivity had not helped and he had lacked the light touch needed to maintain a contributing committee.[13]

According to Sheppard, 'ructions worried him' and he was 'anxious to be liked', but problems never caused him to falter. He was 'a fighter and never lacked personal courage. He could be obstinate and magnanimous – at the same time'.[14] A more patient and accommodating approach might have caused fewer 'explosions', but it is doubtful whether someone willing to debate and discuss every issue could have achieved as much as Spence did.

When he handed over the presidency to Holford, in 1960, the Council had been reconstituted and issues of democracy and representation had been addressed, the administration of the Institute had been reformed on a more obviously professional footing, and committee organisation had been streamlined. Closer links had been forged with Allied Societies overseas, and the interface between the RIBA and the public had also been improved through Spence's enthusiastic promotion of architecture.

There was, however, a great deal of work still in progress. While Spence had given architecture a more public and personable face, he had not seen the

[10]Ibid.
[11]Hugh Casson interviewed by Bruce Youell, 7 November 1979, notes courtesy of Brian Edwards
[12]Ibid.
[13]Ibid.
[14]Richard Sheppard, Spence obituary, *RIBAJ,* January 1977, p.40

profession become ‘indispensable’ as he had hoped it would.[15] The status of the profession was still a major issue; a large volume of architectural work was still carried out without the input of a qualified architect; across the country many local authorities still carried out architectural work through the engineer’s or surveyor’s department and surveys consistently put architects at the bottom of the table of professional earnings.[16]

The campaign to ensure architectural involvement in road planning had achieved little success and Spence’s suggestion of a ‘higher council’ to discuss issues of planning and design had deepened suspicion about the RIBA’s territorial intentions, rather than increasing collaboration between architects and engineers.

In Spence’s defence, issues of status and remuneration were not going to be solved within a two year period, if indeed they ever could be. Likewise, suspicions between architecture and the associated building professions had a very long history; achieving trust and collaboration between the groups was going to take a great deal of time and diplomacy.

Spence’s presidency achieved a great deal and both profession and Institute benefited from his enormous energy and enthusiasm. His nomination may have caused concern among some of the Council, but as Sheppard wrote in his obituary for Spence, ‘the man and the circumstances seldom coincide as they did in him’.[17]

[15]MS 2329/X/7/3/78-79 Notes 24 October 1958
[16]*RIBAJ,* April 1960, p.195
[17]*RIBAJ,* January 1977, pp.40-41

8.2. Donald Gibson PRIBA

> Good management…depends among
> other things upon a deep insight into
> human aspirations, needs and behaviour
> and so does good architecture.
>
> Donald Gibson, 1963.[1]

Gibson's presidency of the RIBA came at a time of relative stability and apparently good relations within the Institute. He faced none of the problems which beset Spence; the RIBA now had a representative and democratic Council; the administrative and committee organisation of the Institute had been overhauled; communication between the membership and the leadership was much improved and the Council had a far greater knowledge and understanding of the needs of the profession.

Beneath the surface, however, little had changed. The open division between the sectors had simply been masked by the dominance of the public architect and private practice was 'in retreat'.[2] The profession was still trying to gain recognition for the status of the architect and to establish him as a mandatory officer within local government, and another division was forming within the profession between the architect and the architectural technician.

This section will begin with a brief examination of Gibson's career in the six years between leaving Nottinghamshire and becoming President of the RIBA. In the absence of similar body of evidence to that available for Spence's presidency, the section will the look at some of the events and issues that were discussed during Gibson's presidency, rather than directly assessing his approach to the role.

[1] Donald Gibson, Introduction to *Handbook of Architectural Practice and Management,* Instalment 1 (London: RIBA, 1963)
[2] Glendinning (2008), p.311

8.2a. From Local Government to Central Government, 1958-1964.

Early in 1957 work began on the first of Nottinghamshire's new CLASP schools, the Bancroft Lane School, Mansfield. At the same time the Government announced the formation of a Committee, under the chairmanship of Lord Weeks, to investigate the Army Works Service. Work on Bancroft Lane School was completed in September and the Weeks Committee presented their report in October, recommending that the service should be radically reorganised and placed under civilian control. In March 1958 it was announced that Donald Gibson had been appointed to head the new organisation as Director-General of Works in the War Office.[1]

Gibson brought his ideas on collaboration and team work into the new department and twinned the professional team and the civil service administrators, thereby reducing the likelihood of administrative objections or obstructions to design proposals.[2] His appointment was seen as denoting 'a rise in the status of man within the military machine' and as signifying 'a concern to house the new Army in a suitable way'.[3] Under Gibson's leadership the team set about redesigning army accommodation, from the furniture to barracks and hospitals, computer buildings and equine operating theatres. The idea that a standard approach to army accommodation fitted all scenarios no longer applied and overseas work would be planned 'after a staff architect […] spent a month or so in the area studying local problems'.[4] As one newspaper report noted, Gibson 'splendidly revolutionised and humanised [the] attitude to

[1] *The Guardian,* 4 March 1958, p.4
[2] Sir Roger Walters, Gibson Memorial Celebration, 2 April 1992.
[3] *The Guardian,* 16 April 1963, p.5
[4] Kenneth J Robinson, 'Design for Army Living', *Observer*, 1 January 1961, p.7

military building' and the 'former unimaginative office outlook' was 'completely abandoned.'[5]

Gibson's role in the War Office also brought his and Spence's professional lives together once again following Spence's appointment to design the new Hyde Park Barracks.[6]

At the beginning of 1962 Gibson received a knighthood for his contribution to architecture and planning.[7] Further changes were taking place in central Government as a new Ministry of Public Building and Works was created which encompassed the old Ministry of Works and the building and civil engineering work of the War Office. A Directorate of Research and Development was created within the new Ministry and Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, intended that its Director-General would:

> co-ordinate and extend the activities of the various Research and Development groups throughout the Government service, encourage and develop generally the use of new and rapid methods of construction; […] standardise the use and production of building components to the greatest possible extent; and secure the widespread dissemination of the best modern practice.[8]

In November 1962 it was announced that Gibson would be the new Director General of Research and Development.[9] The status of his position within the state machine initially caused some difficulties. Geoffrey Rippon, Minister of Public Building and Works, had put under Gibson's 'direct control […] a staff carrying out selected development schemes' which would enable him 'to test in practice the operational principles under examination', he also had 'co-ordination responsibilities throughout the Government service.'[10]

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[5] Gibson Coll.: unsourced news cutting.
[6] Gibson's approach to design for the army and his work with Spence is discussed in Miles Glendinning, 'The tall barracks artistically reconsidered', in Boyd Whyte (2007), pp.223-245
[7] *Guardian*, 5 January 1962, p.8: Robert Matthew also received a knighthood.
[8] Gibson Coll.: Personal minute from Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, 25 October 1962.
[9] *The Observer* (11 November 1962), p.5
[10] Gibson Coll.: Letter Rippon to Gibson, 1 November 1962.

Gibson wanted to be answerable only to the Minister, but effectively this would give him the status of Permanent Secretary and would naturally cause problems with the existing Permanent Secretary.[11] Eventually Rippon suggested that Gibson should report directly to the Minister, but receive a lower salary than the Permanent Secretary; this was agreed to.[12]

In his previous post Gibson had faced the challenge of bringing a 'more paternal interest in living conditions' for soldiers into an institution with long-standing traditions.[13] His new post brought the challenges of coordinating research and development throughout the Government service, of bringing greater order and efficiency to a chaotic building industry, of overcoming that industry's inertia towards change and of greatly increasing its productivity.[14] It also brought Gibson into potential conflict with his profession, as he was charged with championing the increased use of industrialised building systems. Architects were feeling increasing beleaguered by the growth of the package-deal builder offering 'contractors' "closed" systems', and the position of the architect as the leader of the building team was seen to be under serious threat.[15]

The architectural correspondent of *The Times* felt that Gibson was the obvious first choice for any post which required 'a combination of technical insight and administrative experience with the ability to fight a policy through the modern bureaucratic machine […] without losing sight of the principles that make the fight worth undertaking'.[16]

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[11] Sir Roger Walters speaking at Memorial Celebration
[12] Glendinning (2008), p.312; Finnemore (1989), p.138
[13] *Observer*, 1 January 1961, p.7
[14] Gibson addressed the Institute of Builders in April 1963 and told them that output had to increase by 55% over the next 10 years, with a workforce expansion of only 2%: *Guardian,* 24 April 1963, p.20; The Emmerson Report, which examined the chaotic organisation of the building industry, was prepared for the Minister of Works in 1962. Its findings were to be implemented by Geoffrey Rippon.
[15] Glendinning (2008), p.312
[16] *The Times*, 6 November 1962.

Gibson's fight was not just with the ‘bureaucratic machine’; his plans affected all sectors of the building industry. He wanted wholesale changes in the approach to tendering and contracts with ‘open competition replaced by negotiation with selected contractors’.[17] Dimensional co-ordination should be established and measurements for elements such as ceiling heights, pipes and windows should be standardised across authorities and manufacturers; something which no one had ‘dared to do’.[18] The building industry also had to be encouraged to change its working methods and practices. It had to accept that stopping work for rain and snow was ‘one luxury which we should no longer afford’ and building labour should not simply be ‘handed over to the tax-payer and recalled when the sun shines.’[19]

Despite Gibson’s focus on collaboration between the professions, he remained unwavering in his view that one person should coordinate all the specialists involved in the building team and that the client should be able to turn to one person for advice on all aspects of the building; in both cases that person should be the architect.[20]

Coordinated research and development, effective communication of ideas and promotion of industrialised systems were fundamental to achieving the improvements which Gibson sought, and he proposed the creation of a central agency, which would bring together these key areas in the field of public housing. The idea was taken into the public arena by Rippon, who envisaged the proposed National Building Agency (NBA) as ‘a large design office […] undertaking schemes for a large number of authorities’, bringing work together ‘into substantial contracts’ and ‘having the power to employ consultant

[17] Donald Gibson, ‘The needs of our industry and the way ahead’, *RIBAJ*, September 1963, p361
[18] Tyrrell Burgess, ‘The Coordinator of Research’, *New Society*, 22 November 1962, p.14
[19] *RIBAJ*, September 1963, p.362
[20] Ibid., p.361

architects'.[21] The proposals for the new agency promised a great deal and encapsulated Gibson's long held views on the benefits of pre-fabricated and industrialised building systems in housing, but the idea was met with suspicion and direct resistance from central government, the building industry and architects.[22] By the time of the Agency's launch, its remit had been reduced to little more than an advisory and organisational body.[23] Within the Agency itself there were tensions. Cleeve Barr was appointed deputy chairman and Stirrat Johnson-Marshall became a part-time director.[24] The Chairman, however, had a background in engineering and, as Gold points out, the Board of Directors 'was thereby doomed to replicate the usual frictions between engineers and architects.'[25] As a result the Agency never achieved the influence or exercised the developmental role which Gibson must have hoped it would.

8.2b. Gibson's Presidency, 1964-1965.

William Holford followed Spence as President of the RIBA and continued to develop and embed the reforms which his predecessor had instituted. In 1962 he was succeeded by Robert Matthew. Matthew had worked for nearly a decade to bring public sector architects to a position of dominance within the Institute and his election marked the culmination of that process. His term of office 'finalised the RIBA's transformation from a "moribund learned society" into an influential, modern institution'.[1]

The restructuring of the Institute's administration on civil-service lines had been approved during Spence's tenure and instituted during Holford's

[21] Rippon quoted in Gold (2007), p.197
[22] *RIBAJ* (January 1964), p.5; Gold (2007), p.198
[23] For a more detailed discussion of the NBA see Gold (2007), pp.196-200
[24] *RIBAJ* (March 1964), p.94
[25] Gold (2007), p.199
[1] Glendinning (2008), p.310

presidency. Additional reforms now rationalised the organisation still further creating four departments within the Institute each with an under-secretary.

Richard Sheppard's Ad Hoc Committee had provided the Institute with its first accurate appraisal of the state and structure of the profession; during Holford's term of office, Ricketts set out to look more closely at how individual practices were structured and how they organised their work. The resulting report, *The Architect and his Office*, revealed loss-making inefficiencies in organisation across a wide diversity of practice types.

Matthew oversaw the translation of the findings into a series of standard documents, including the *Handbook of Architectural Practice and Management*.[2] Gibson, whose role within the Ministry of Public Building and Works was to improve efficiency and productivity, was asked to write the introduction to the *Handbook*. His thoughts on the compatibility of management and architecture encapsulated the very successful approach he had taken throughout his career:

> Because architecture is one of the arts; because the practice of architecture is a very human activity; because architects must react sensitively and humanely to the needs of society it is legitimate question as to whether management and architecture are compatible. There need be no doubt that they are compatible; management; which is both an art and a skill, is the creation of conditions in which material and human resources can be used to the greatest effect.[3]

Although Matthew had been in private practice for several years, his public sector credentials ensured that his presidency was viewed as the consolidation of the position of the official architect within the Institute.[4] He was keen to ensure that his successor would continue that process on and Gibson, with his unbroken record of public sector service and at that time serving as Honorary

[2] Glendinning (2008), p.311
[3] *RIBAJ*, August 1964, p.343
[4] Matthew resigned from the LCC in 1953 to become Professor of Architecture at Edinburgh University and Head of the School of Architecture at ECA. In 1956 he went into partnership with Stirrat Johnson-Marshall, forming Robert Matthew Johnson-Marshall.

Secretary of the RIBA, was an obvious choice for the role. Matthew was considering the issue of his successor even before he himself officially became President, and he appears to have raised the matter with Gibson just prior to, or immediately upon, taking over from Holford on 1st July 1962.

On the 4th July Ricketts wrote to Matthew. He had seen a note from Gibson who, with characteristic modesty, was proposing Leonard Howitt as a better choice for President.[5] Ricketts did not believe that this was a suggestion 'to be taken seriously'; Matthew's successor had to be 'Donald himself' or another official architect.[6]

Eighteen months later, as the time approached for nominating the next President, the matter became more urgent and Ricketts wrote to Matthew suggesting three names, of which Gibson and Lewis Womersley, Sheffield City Architect were the immediate choices.[7] Ricketts had sought the advice of Stirrat Johnson-Marshall who, he believed, voiced widespread feelings in the profession that 'Gibson, at present, looks a smaller man than he really is, Womersley a rather bigger one.[8] The one thing which Ricketts felt might stand against Gibson was 'the potential of his department "to alarm the profession"'. In the event this does not seem to have caused difficulties and Gibson was offered the nomination. Despite his initial reticence he accepted, but with the proviso 'that he would serve for only one year, from July 1st 1964', rather than the customary two.[9]

[5] Ibid. p.309
[6] Ibid; Howitt died just before Gibson became President: *RIBAJ,* July 1964, p.336
[7] Glendinning (2008), p.310
[8] Letters of 18 and 28 February 1964, held in the Edinburgh University Library Matthew Collection, quoted in Glendinning (2008), p.310.
[9] Glendinning (2008), p.310; RIBA Press Release, 1964, in Gibson Biographical File RIBA Library.

His nomination was officially announced in May's edition of the *RIBAJ*.[10] The *Evening Standard* reported that 'we can expect a flood of original ideas when he takes up his post.'[11]

Gibson chaired his first Council meeting as President on 17th July. Cleeve Barr was re-elected as Honorary Secretary and Arthur Ling became Honorary Treasurer. Stirrat Johnson-Marshall became a Vice-President, although he could not officially take office until October when he became a Fellow of the Institute.[12] Gibson's former colleagues from Coventry and Nottingham, John Barker and Henry Swain were elected to Council and notably Jane Drew became the first woman ever to hold a seat on the body.[13]

For over four decades the tensions, open animosities and suspicions between the public and private sectors had been most clearly expressed in relationship between the AASTA and ABT unions and the RIBA; now four of the leading figures in that union battle were leading the Institute. Their presence indicated the remarkable change which had taken place in the balance of power within the RIBA, particularly over the preceding decade. It cannot, however, be taken to indicate a final resolution of the conflict between the sectors and a recognition and acceptance of the equal status of the official architect. Instead it represented the displacement of one order by another, which simply masked, rather than healed, the underlying rift between the sectors.

At the AGM of the Association of Official Architects (formerly the Local Government Architects' Association), held in May 1964, Thurston Williams had reported that the organisation was struggling financially despite its large membership and he felt that the RIBA could do more to help.[14] In a familiarly

[10] *RIBAJ*, May 1964, p.180
[11] *Evening Standard,* 7 May 1964.
[12] *RIBAJ,* August 1964, p.343
[13] *RIBAJ*, July 1964, p.294
[14] *RIBAJ*, July 1964, p329. It had a membership of over 2100.

worded attack one speaker accused the RIBA of using its Charter as an excuse not to help the Association and said that 'it was obvious that many who were in private practice were not in sympathy with the salaried architects'.[15]

This point of view was not new and could be dismissed simply as a standard repetition of a rather hackneyed idea. It cannot be discounted, however, because it was expressed at a time when the public sector was the dominant presence within the Institute and yet the speaker still clearly equated the decision making processes of the RIBA with the private practitioner. Whether this was because the public representatives within the Council were perceived to have acquiesced to the private sector's requirements, or whether, more worryingly, public sector representatives became equated with the private sector when they reached a position of power, is not clear.

Though tensions between the sectors were clearly still present, the general relationship between the RIBA and its wider membership had changed for the better since the events preceding Spence's presidency. An increase in subscription rates had helped to precipitate the events of the 1958 AGM; a referendum on an increase was held prior to Gibson taking office and, although only half the membership took part, the majority of them voted in favour, which suggests that they were happier with the work the Institute was doing and with the benefits they gained from membership.[16]

Gibson's approach to the Council meetings can, to an extent, be gauged from the brief reports in the *RIBAJ*. At the Council in October it was decided that the procedure for the meeting would change and that 'discussion would be focussed on the most important items of the Agenda papers'.[17] The report of the December meeting noted that Gibson's 'expeditious chairmanship', had

[15] *RIBAJ*, August 1964, p.330
[16] *RIBAJ*, July 1964, p.295
[17] *RIBAJ*, November 1964, p.451

allowed a thorough debate of the important points of 'an indigestible menu' of an agenda 'with no fewer than 16 items, several of them substantial.'[18] There do not seem to have been any of the 'explosions' in the chamber which were a feature of Spence's presidency.[19]

In November Gibson gave his Inaugural Address to the Institute.[20] It was very different in character to Spence's 1958 Address and once again highlights their very different approaches to the practice of architecture. While Spence had focussed on the essential art of architecture and quality in design, Gibson concentrated on the mechanics of practice and the demands ahead for the profession. Gibson's Address also, importantly, underlines the unhappy fact that over the twenty-five years since he created an acknowledged model of good office practice and organisation in Coventry, on a wider scale very little had changed for the public sector architect. While reform had finally been forced on the RIBA, the more complex workings of local authorities had proved immutable.

In his 1958 Address Spence had spoken of the architect as the 'servant of humanity', Gibson's emphasis was slightly different and he spoke of the profession 'serving the nation'.[21] The architect, he said, was now 'recognised as playing a key role in [the] nation's future', but he expressed that key role as primarily an economic one and his first concern was how the architect could help to increase productivity; improving quality was mentioned after increased output.

Firstly, in meeting the challenges that lay ahead, the profession had to consider how many architects it needed and he suggested that in addition to

[18] *RIBAJ*, January 1965, p.3
[19] Richard Sheppard, Spence obituary, *RIBAJ,* January 1977, pp.40-41
[20] *RIBAJ*, December 1964, pp.498-504
[21] *RIBAJ,* December 1958, pp.46-50; *RIBAJ*, December 1964, p.498

the Board of Architectural Education's annual review, a report should be presented biannually to the AGM. Unevenness of the work load across the country was another important factor which needed to be addressed, and he suggested that the RIBA could keep a register of all practices, listing capacity and work-load. More radically, while acknowledging the inherent difficulties, he suggested that the RIBA might 'control enough new commissions to be able to 'top up' the emptying reservoirs'.[22]

The public sector had a large role to play in ensuring a 'maximum equality of opportunity', but here he noted the necessary tendency to give large projects to large private practices, and he suggested that the formation of group practices or consortia might allow smaller practices the opportunity to take part in larger contracts. He believed that the future of the profession lay in the larger practice, but noted that creative satisfaction for architects would only be ensured if delegation of responsibility operated down to 'the lowest possible level'.[23] Those firms who understood how to delegate would attract the best architects and produce the best architecture. Full delegation through 'group working' had been a feature of his Coventry Department, and an issue of central importance to AASTA, nevertheless, despite a long running campaign and the exemplar of the Coventry office, Gibson was still having to make a case for responsibility to be passed down through the office hierarchy.

Gibson then turned to the problems facing the public sector and the points he raised show how little the administrative mechanisms of local authorities had changed over the preceding decades. Public architectural offices faced a huge problem in recruiting and keeping staff and a vicious circle resulted, in which a lack of staff led to work being given out to the private sector and the private

[22] *RIBAJ*, December 1964, p.499.
[23] Ibid.,

sector, in turn, recruited staff from public offices in order to cope with the work load. Gibson placed the blame for this with the predominantly pyramidal hierarchy of salaries in local government. Some twenty-five years earlier Gibson had stated that the architect, as town planner, should have 'authority […] over all the other officers in any local authority.'[24] He now effectively reiterated that view: there was 'no good reason why any but the Chief Administrative Officer should earn more than the Chief Architect'.[25] His comment that in some authorities the architect was still 'under an engineer', underlined the fact that a great deal of progress still had to be made in asserting the status of the architect.[26]

If local authorities were not prepared to pay for the 'calibre of men' needed, then they would not get the quality of architecture they required. Sadly, Gibson was not optimistic about the future: 'The very lifeblood of any continuing organisation lies in an entry of bright young people over the years. Time is running very much against us now, both in central and local government.'[27]

Gibson then moved on to industrialised building, his Ministry remit, and once again asserted the architect's position as the head of the process: 'the first member of the building team to go in and bat.'[28] Industrialised building was vital to overcome the lack of manpower in the building industry and standardisation would allow workers to increase output. He noted that 'there are some whose attitude of mind will militate against the enthusiastic acceptance of this approach by our profession', but he asked them to look towards the CLASP school's success in the Milan Triennale and the work of Issigonis for the British Motor Corporation.[29] The Greeks and Romans, Renaissance and Georgian

[24] Donald Gibson, 'Post-War Civil Development', *Camera Principis* (August 1940), p.2
[25] *RIBAJ*, December 1964,p.500
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.

architects had produced 'their own disciplined modular vocabulary of design' and architects now had to do the same.[30]

Spence had upset various sectors of the industry when he had proposed a 'higher council' for those involved in construction, Gibson now turned to the same issue but took a different approach.[31] He proposed a National Headquarters Building where all the branches of architecture, planning and engineering could have their administrative offices, with shared library and lecturing facilities.[32] How this idea was received by the various groups is not known.

Spence had sought a central role for architects in the planning and design of new roads, Gibson now reiterated much of what Spence had said, but he took as his starting point the recently published Buchanan Report *Traffic in Towns* and the RIBA commissioned Goss Report which showed, alarmingly, that 'most towns and cities have no architects in their planning teams'.[33] The architect's role in the planning of cities, towns and villages was crucial and schools of architecture needed to specialise in training architects with an interest in planning.[34] Once again Gibson's comments highlighted how little mechanisms within local authorities had changed over time. In Coventry he had become one of the first official architects to jointly hold architectural and planning remits, and his planning and architectural departments had worked closely together, but the example set had not become common practice.

Having discussed the present state of the building industry, Gibson moved on to the future and made a case for large new cities built on linear principles,

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[30] Ibid.
[31] *RIBAJ,* December 1959, p.37
[32] *RIBAJ*, December 1964, p.500
[33] Ibid.; the tensions between planners and architects is discussed by Mark Long in 'The post-war planning office: Coventry's department of architecture and planning 1957-1966', PhD Thesis (Liverpool University, 1986)
[34] *RIBAJ*, December 1964, p.501

with monorails, moving pavements and district heating systems to cut energy costs. Schools in these new cities should serve multiple functions, providing a wide range of public facilities, from libraries to swimming baths, and playing fields should be made usable all year round with surfaces of 'plastic grass' and illumination for night time use.[35] His views were prophetic, but out of everything contained in his speech, it was the 'plastic grass' which was naturally picked up by the press and appeared in several headlines.[36]

In seconding the Vote of Thanks, Robert Matthew asked 'who under these circumstances could be more fitted to lead our architectural profession […]?'[37] Gibson was, he said, 'a man of action' and where ever he went there was 'somehow or other a great leap forward and no subsequent steps back.'[38]

One of the issues faced by the Institute during Gibson's presidency was the place of architectural and associated technicians within the profession. The recommendations of the 1958 Oxford Conference had recognised the need for two distinct strands of training within architecture: one for architects who would be carrying out design work and one for technicians who would have a practical rather than design based input.[39] The 1962 report *The Architect and his Office* had highlighted the need for this non-design group to have representation through an organisation which could ensure maintenance of standards in their education and, in October 1964, as part of the consultative process the RIBA sponsored a series of regional meetings in London, Glasgow, Birmingham and Manchester.[40] The issue was considered at December's Council meeting, where concerns had centred on the links between the RIBA and the new organisation and between the architect and the technician. It had also been

[35] Ibid., p.504
[36] The *Sheffield Telegraph*, 4 November 1964, commented that 'it is a vision we find revolting'.
[37] *RIBAJ*, December 1964, p.505
[38] Ibid.
[39] Crinson and Lubbock (1994), p.141-2
[40] *RIBAJ*, October 1964, p.418

pointed out that while the RIBA was proposing to give £1,500 of support to the new organisation, the Association of Official Architects had struggled to get financial help. After a very lengthy debate and some 'sharp divisions of opinion' the decision to back the creation of a technicians organisation was 'carried by a very large majority'.[41]

In January the *RIBAJ* reported that the Institute was to 'support the immediate formation of a representative organisation' for technicians.[42] It would be an independent body, but the RIBA would 'seek to be actively represented on [its] council and education committee'.[43]

There had been dissent from some architectural assistants who 'wished to remain under the RIBA's umbrella', but in February 1965 the Society of Architectural and Associated Technicians (SAAT) was created.[44] As Crinson and Lubbock point out the creation of this new class within the profession was 'one aspect of the way in which the profession continued to tighten its boundaries'.[45]

February's Council discussed primarily the work of the Board of Architectural Education and the further implementation of the Oxford Conference recommendations that architectural education should be through full time courses based within University schools.[46] It was felt that recognised schools in Colleges of Art had reached 'the limit of their development'.[47] The question of training architect planners was also discussed as one Council member feared that architects would be replaced in planning roles by 'geographers and others who could be trained more quickly'.[48]

[41] *RIBAJ*, January 1965, p.3
[42] *RIBAJ*, January 1965, p.6
[43] Ibid.
[44] *RIBAJ*, March 1965, p.111
[45] Crinson and Lubbock (1994), p.142
[46] *RIBAJ*, March 1965, p.107
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.

The Council meeting ended with the approval of a special award to be made to the LCC, prior to its dissolution, to recognise the 'outstanding contribution' made by its Architect's Department since the war'.[49] While the replacement of the LCC by the Greater London Council created considerable concerns over the fate of its Architect's Department, the process of delegating responsibilities to boroughs also raised issues which served to highlight anomalies within the regulation of the profession, and the patchy progress which had been made in establishing the essential role and status of the architect within local government.

Under the London Government Act (1963) powers officially devolved to the boroughs in April 1965, but they were only statutorily required to have a borough architect in place from 1968. Hackney moved fairly quickly and announced in September 1964 that their new chief architect and planning officer would be the current borough engineer, surveyor and architect of Shoreditch. The appointment, however, highlighted an embarrassing anomaly for the RIBA in the regulation of the profession: the appointed architect was not registered with the Architects Registration Council. He had held his post prior to the 1938 Registration Act, had 'continued to do so "*honoris causa*"', and 'it just so happened' that he never registered.[50]

The action of Kensington and Chelsea Council underlined a different issue. They had decided not to appoint a borough architect until obliged to do so. The matter was raised in the letters columns of *The Guardian* by the Chair of the Kensington Architectural Group, who pointed out that the Council were advertising for 'low to medium grade architects and planners to work under the

[49] Ibid., p.108
[50] *Guardian*, 12 September 1964, p.3

borough engineer', despite having been told that they would not get the right calibre of man unless he could head his own department.[51]

The Leader of the Council responded that the complaint illustrated the 'power and persistence of the "architects' lobby"'.[52] While the Council's responsibility was confined to housing it would continue with the approach which had served the borough best, namely depending on the 'skill and diversity of approach obtained by the employment of private architects of the highest reputation'.[53] Gibson wrote to express his concern over this 'disturbing attitude', pointing out that the considerable range of buildings needed by the borough required coordination, 'a clear brief and imaginative guidance.'[54] The 'vital social and environmental problems involved' could 'only be satisfactorily undertaken by inter-professional teams comprising architect, planner, and engineer as heads of their own department'.[55]

Whether the RIBA's intervention encouraged Kensington and Chelsea to rethink is not known, but the fact that it was still necessary for the Institute to plead the architect's case underlined a depressingly persistent failure by some local authorities to accord the architect a higher status.

As the division of the profession into architects and technicians created some unease within the profession, the very long running tensions between the public and private sectors came to the fore once again. The rise of the public sector within the Institute had been at the expense of private practitioners and, as Glendinning writes, 'the previously dominant private practice grouping was still in retreat, with the traditional private practitioners feeling themselves ever more squeezed between public architecture and the speculative or package

[51] *Guardian*, 3 December 1964, p.10
[52] *Guardian*, 7 December 1964, p.10
[53] Ibid.
[54] *Guardian,* 11 December 1964
[55] Ibid.

deal builder.'[56] In April the Council considered a proposal by a group of private architects to form an 'Association of Privately Practising Architects'. The idea 'aroused some very sharp criticism' from those who viewed it as a retrograde step which would divide the Institute and divide principals from salaried members.[57] While the Institute was prepared to consider a discussion group it would not countenance anything more formal.

Eventually Council approval was given to the formation of an Association of Private Architects under the Chairmanship of J A Brownrigg, but the group was to have no formal links with the RIBA, was not to ask for subscriptions, and was not to cut across any of the committees of the Institute. Its purpose was as an informal discussion group which would keep a watching brief on private practice and consider the services needed by that sector.[58]

The main topic of discussion at the May AGM was architectural training.[59] Following on from the Oxford Conference and the Robbins report on the expansion of university education, several universities had contacted the RIBA regarding the creation of schools of architecture. Courses for the joint training of building, architecture and planning students were being set up and the Board was focussing on encouraging schools of architecture to spend more time on planning studies.

Architectural education continued to be the focus of Gibson's last months in office as he led a delegation to the Commonwealth conference in Malta in June, and to VIII congress and IX assembly of International Union of Architects in Paris in July, both of which discussed architectural training.[60]

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[56] Glendinning (2008), p.311
[57] *RIBAJ*, May 1965, p.212
[58] Ibid., p.221
[59] *RIBAJ*, June 1965, p.269
[60] *RIBAJ*, May 1964, p.222

In July he handed over the reins of the presidency to Lionel Brett. On the surface it had been a far calmer and less frenetic period than that faced by Spence, nevertheless the undercurrents of division and tension were clearly still present and Gibson's twelve months of office could achieve little in ameliorating such deep seated issues.

8.3. Post-Presidency.

Gibson was made Hoffman Wood Professor of Architecture at Leeds University for the 1966-67 session, a post which Spence held in 1955, and he used this and other lecturing invitations to continue to push at the boundaries of architectural and planning thought during the later years of his career.[1] Some of his ideas, such as a new city in the Lake District, were dismissed as eccentric.[2] Others such as a prefabricated road tunnel sunk onto the bottom of the Thames to take east-west traffic through the capital, a floating airport on the Thames estuary and new islands made from hollow plastic pontoons which could be filled with soil for planting, were, like his idea for plastic grass playing fields, ahead of their time.[3]

He continued as Director-General of Research and Development until 1967 when he was promoted to the position of Controller-General in the Ministry of Public Building and Works. Being so remote from the team work on which he had thrived left him increasingly dissatisfied and unhappy in his job; as Sir Roger Walters said at Gibson's memorial service, 'he was in charge of everything and in control of nothing. He was too far from the action.'[4]

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[1] *Guardian*, 3 December 1966, p.11
[2] 'New city in the Lakes?', *Guardian*, 4 March 1966, p.1 and 5 March 1966, p.3
[3] 'New airport could "float" on Thames estuary mud', *Guardian*, 27 January 1967, p.3; 'A plea for great new cities', *Guardian*, 11 October 1967, p.3.
[4] Sir Roger Walters, tribute given at RIBA Memorial Celebration for Gibson held 2 April 1992.

Gibson retired in 1969 and a farewell party was held on a boat on the Thames, when the boat reached the Houses of Parliament Gibson 'took off his bowler hat and flung it as far as he could into the water.'[5] He retired to his house on Anglesey and although maintaining an interest in architecture as Chairman of the North Wales Society of Architects, Public Affairs Committee, he devoted himself to his home, garden and building engines for his model railway.[6] He died there three days before Christmas 1991.

Although Spence's presidency was followed by a period of reorganisation in his offices, with Andrew Renton leaving to set up on his own, the 1960s were a very busy and prosperous time for Spence's London and Edinburgh practices. Prestigious projects included the Hyde Park Cavalry Barracks, the British Embassy in Rome, and the 'Beehive' extension to Parliament House, Wellington, New Zealand. Progress continued on Southampton and Sussex Universities and Falmar House, the first of the Sussex buildings, opened in 1962. The twenty-storey housing blocks of the Gorbals, Hutchesontown C development were opened in 1965 and Spence designed the British Pavilion for Expo '67, Montreal. Hyde Park Barracks opened in 1971 and the Rome Embassy in 1972.

Spence eventually withdrew from direct involvement in his Fitzroy Square practice, Sir Basil Spence, Bonnington & Collins, in 1969, and from the Moray Place practice, Sir Basil Spence, Glover & Ferguson in 1972, but he retained a consultancy in each.[7] He maintained an active role in his Canonbury practice, Sir Basil Spence O.M., R.A., but spent increasing time abroad at holiday homes in Majorca and then Malta, as his last years became marred by controversy.

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[5] Ibid.
[6] Gibson letter to *The Times*, 31 October 1970, p.13
[7] Walker, 'Practice History 1960-1970', (2009), unpublished essay produced for AHRC Spence project, held in AHRC Spence archive.

Hyde Park Barracks, as well as causing dismay to those who saw its tower as disfiguring a Royal Park, went over budget and the Government threatened legal action.[8] His proposals for the Queen Anne's Gate development led to a bitter public battle with Lord Molson, and with the *AJ* over their concerted attack on him; his plans for the Alwynes development close to his Canonbury office aroused the anger of his near neighbours; 'they were' he said '*terribly* rude to me'.[9]

Having become the public face of architecture in the 1950s and 1960s, and one of the few architects asked for his autograph, his fall from grace was sudden and unexpected.[10] His bewilderment was evident in an interview given to *The Times* in 1972, following the attack on the Queen Anne's Gate proposals. He had been 'mortally wounded at being rejected by this criticism. Only 10 years ago, in 1962, I was awarded the Order of Merit, I was given honorary degrees and I was very much in demand.' It was, he said, 'bound to be a terrible disappointment'.[11]

He continued to work on projects abroad and was preparing proposals for a Cultural Centre for Bahrain when he died, at his home in Yaxley, in 1976.

[8] Geoffrey Jellicoe, a friend of Spence, wrote to *The Times* (8 August 1963) to complain about the Hyde Park proposals and the tower of the Barracks being 'allowed to overshadow one of the finest of Royal Parks'. In the following exchange of letters Spence wrote to Jellicoe 'I love you too much to get really angry, but I must admit to getting a slight jolt when I read your letter in The Times' (RCAHMS MS2329/X/19/16/192 letter 16 September 1963); 'DoE issues writ against Sir Basil Spence over Knightsbridge Barracks', *Building*, 12 April 1974.
[9] Pryce-Jones (1973)
[10] Ibid.
[11] Geoffrey Wansell, 'Sir Basil defends his Mansions', *The Times*, 10 July 1972.

9. The RIBA and the salaried sector in the 1970s.

The early 1970s proved to be a very difficult period for the profession and events underscored the essentially unchanging and unchangeable nature of the public sector's problems with regard to representation and status.

Gibson was followed by a series of presidents who had had experience in the public sector, but it would be 1974 before Fred Pooley, former deputy to Gibson in Coventry, became the next, and final, public architect to hold the presidency whilst in public employment.[1]

Over the intervening period the tensions and divisions between the sectors had grown steadily worse. In 1968 Ricketts, 'overwhelmed' by the problems, committed suicide, and in the early 1970s several factors combined to precipitate another 'major dissension of the ordinary RIBA membership'.[2] The confidence of the profession and the public had been shaken by corruption scandals and the collapse of Ronan Point in 1968. The proposed reorganisation of local government was seen as a potential threat to public sector architects and conflict once again arose between the public sector's need for representation in employment negotiations and the RIBA's inability to act for it in that capacity, whilst at the same time being able to negotiate on behalf of the private sector. Although many of the RIBA Council had had experience in the public sector, most were now private principals and many of the ordinary membership once again felt that they had no adequate representation within the Institute.

In May 1971 a report published by the RIBA Intelligence Unit, and a paper presented by Malcolm MacEwan, former editor of the *RIBAJ* and the Institute's

[1] Pooley held the presidency from 1973-75.
[2] Glendinning (2008), p.311; McIlveen (1998), p.24

first Director of Public Affairs, provided an unsettling picture of the position of the salaried architect within the Institute.[3]

The Report found that despite the fact that between sixty and seventy percent of RIBA members were in some way affected by the implications of industrial relations legislation on their salaries and employment conditions:

> they are virtually unrepresented within the RIBA, which is largely geared to serve practices, principals, and chief officers, all are the beneficiaries of the work carried out on behalf of the whole profession. Nevertheless it is difficult to point to any specific activity undertaken on their behalf.[4]

MacEwan stated that salaried architects were unlikely 'to accept a subordinate role for much longer.'[5] Although they formed the majority within the Institute, they were 'denied an effective share in the RIBA government; it neither defends their specific interests nor develops its full potential as a learned or environmental centre in which they could play a real part. […] the status quo has no future.'[6]

Towards the end of the year it was, once again, financial problems within the Institute, and a proposal to increase subscriptions, which pushed the membership into open dissent. Architects from the GLC called for a Special General Meeting and the Council were instructed to 're-examine the expenditures of the Institute, and to submit alternative proposals to the membership for approval.'[7] A referendum on the issue resulted in a heavy defeat for the Council and a suggestion from the RIBA President that all Council members might consider resigning before the next elections.[8]

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[3] RIBA Intelligence Unit, 'Salaried Architects and the RIBA', *RIBAJ*, May 1971,pp.213-215; Malcolm MacEwan, ''The Professional Dilemma', *RIBAJ*, May 1971, pp.188-193
[4] RIBA Intelligence Unit (1971), p.213
[5] MacEwan (1971), p.193
[6] Ibid., p.193
[7] *RIBAJ*, December 1971, p.543
[8] McIlveen (1998), p.25

In 1972 a working group, set up to examine the representation which the RIBA might offer to salaried members, reported that 'the RIBA should reconsider its attitude to unionisation and the representation of architects in negotiations on salaries and conditions of employment'.[9] It was unable, however, to recommend a particular union to the public sector, a response which echoed the Council's unsatisfactory deliberations on the same issue in 1954.

The relationship between the Institute and its salaried members had in essence remained unchanged, notwithstanding the efforts of people such as Gibson, Matthew and the Johnson-Marshall brothers. Likewise the position of the architect within local authority departments had also seen little real change.

In 1927 the General Secretary of AASTA, had complained that 'the status of the architect and assistant architect, [...] in the local government service, is such that they are frequently employed in grades below that of corresponding administrative officers and clerks.'[10] Although wages and grading had changed over the intervening years, in most cases the structure of local authority departments had remained static and in 1973, in a paper given at the RIBA, George Oldham could still refer to the pyramidal hierarchy of most local authority departments which resulted in 'an absurd and patently inappropriate structure whose base is composed of highly qualified professionals who are treated like clerks'.[11]

[9] *RIBAJ*, May 1972, p.184
[10] MSS.78/BT/5/4/1 John Mitchell, 'A policy for the profession', p.3
[11] George Oldham, 'Why can't we all be professionals? Reshaping the public office', *RIBAJ,* May 1973, p.

Conclusion.

….so have no more fears
about the 'two tiers'
by gad, Sir, we've built them to last!

David Beecher (*RIBAJ* May 1965)[1]

David Beecher wrote his verses sixty years after architecture was shaken by 'the first tremors' of the schism between its private and public sectors.[2] Although he was concerned about the new split in the profession, between architects and architectural technicians, his verses about division and membership castes, 'U' and 'non-'U', 'sacrosanct' breeds and 'the fears of the few', could equally sum up six decades of failure to reconcile professional aspirations and expectations with the realities of professional practice.

In examining the tensions between the two sectors it is tempting initially to find fault with the RIBA in its handling of the situation and to apportion blame for its apparently insensitive and blinkered approach to the public sector. The issue has, however, proved to be far more complex and its intractability is testament to the incredibly tangled web of professional perceptions, expectations, prejudices and suspicions which formed the background to British architecture throughout most of the twentieth century.

This thesis set out explore in more detail the origins of the public/private schism, to contribute to the historiography a more detailed account of the relationship between AASTA and the RIBA than currently exists and to examine certain facets of the careers of Sir Basil Spence and Sir Donald Gibson, which again contribute new information to the existing body of knowledge. Exploring the careers of two architects of the stature of Spence and Gibson, against the

[1] *RIBAJ*, May 1965, p.216
[2] Robert Thorne, 'Using the RIBA archive: a historian's view', in Angela Mace *The Royal Institution of British Architects: A guide to its archive and history* (London, New York: Mansell Publishing, 1986), p.xxxii

complicated and tangled background of the architectural profession, has proved challenging. Setting the complexities of the practice of architecture against the wider changes in social and political frameworks and the fundamental shift in the practice and patronage of architecture has proved additionally taxing.

In 1962 Stanley Alderson wrote 'architecture is a profession and that is half the trouble', in fact architecture's pursuit of professional status has proved to be the larger part of 'the trouble'.[3] The tensions between the sectors did not form spontaneously in the early 1900s, but grew around pre-existing and deep-seated professional jealousies between architects and those non-architects who practised architecture, particularly engineers and surveyors. The RIBA was formed to differentiate and distance architects from pretenders to that title and, by the turn of the twentieth century, its actions to protect and enhance the status of its members had created a closely defined framework of professional expectations which could not, and never would, fully accommodate the public salaried architect.

Regardless of the fact that the RIBA, through the Board of Architectural Education, controlled educational requirements and qualification procedures for new entrants to the profession, equality of education did not ensure parity of status. While the public architect was employed, rather than earning a professional fee, while he was subject to a head of department, not his client, and while the RIBA could set fee scales for its private members yet not negotiate on behalf of its public sector members, the salaried architect could never achieve equality of status with his private sector colleague. The Institute's Charter, which circumscribed its activities as a learned institution rather than as union, ensured that the public architect remained effectively outside its remit. Notwithstanding the gradual shift in the balance of power within the RIBA and

[3]Stanley Alderson, *Britain in the Sixties: Housing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p.27

the increased representation of the public sector, the underlying fault lines remained, resulting in a depressingly cyclical repetition of issues between the RIBA and its public sector.

The immutable nature of local authority hierarchies compounded the problems of the public architect; engineers, surveyors and valuers tended to remain in charge of architectural work and the RIBA was never able to fully assert the status of the architect as the only person competent, through training and qualification, to exercise design and planning judgements. Divisions and suspicion remained between the various sectors of the building industry and, although architects such as Gibson and Stirrat Johnson-Marshall exemplified collaborative team-work, the profession's view on the sovereignty of the architect in the design and planning process helped to maintain the divisions.

This thesis has contributed a more detailed account of the history and role of AASTA than exists in the historiography of the profession and has also presented new information on the close relationship between the Association and the organisation of Gibson's Coventry Department. The work has also served to highlight aspects of the Association's relationship with the RIBA which warrant further exploration, most particularly the movement of vocal and highly politicised AASTA members into the leadership of the Institute during the 1950s. The issue of tensions within the public sector and the fact that the stigma of salaried employment seems to have affected even those at the top of the local authority hierarchy would also benefit from further research.

The study of Spence and Gibson's early life and architectural training presents new information on their lives and adds to the historiography of architectural education. The examination of selected projects by each architect has highlighted their differing architectural approaches, expanding on the work

of the Spence Research Project and adding a new dimension to our understanding of both men.

Spence and Gibson's entry into the profession followed two very different childhoods and training. Spence's early years in India left its mark on him and on his architecture, and his first hand experience of financial struggles seems to have engendered a deep self-sufficiency. Gibson's experience of witnessing poverty fed into a deep social conscience and a commitment to public service. The architectural training which each undertook, catered to their differing intellectual and creative needs, but cannot be said to have ultimately influenced their decisions to enter different sectors of the profession. In both cases that decision was rooted in personal philosophy rather than acquired in the process of architectural education.

The early years of practice for each man effectively set the tone for their careers. Spence's highly artistic, eclectic, individualistic approach was evident in a varied portfolio, which exhibited a keen appreciation of form and concern for materials. Gibson's technical approach was evident from the first in the Hilary Haworth Nursery. His appointment as Coventry's first City Architect allowed him to put his thoughts on office organisation into practice and his department embodied the ideals of AASTA, becoming an exemplar of group-working . Despite its close links with the Association, however, philosophical divisions appeared during the war as Gibson's team enthusiastically planned a new civic centre and AASTA argued against planning for futures that would not be realizable.

Research for this thesis has utilised only a fraction of the archival material relating to AASTA's war-time activities and further exploration of this

body of information would add considerably to the understanding of the dynamics of the profession during this crucial period.

The bombing of Coventry brought Gibson, and the role of the architect and planner, to public prominence and served to underline the difficult relationship between the architect and engineer. Coventry eventually provided a platform for both Gibson and Spence to further the role and status of the profession.

The post-war shift towards state patronage of architecture ensured the continued growth of the public sector and changed the balance of power within the profession, but it also created new tensions as the private sector found itself increasingly dependent upon the public sector for work. Despite these very obvious changes within the profession, the RIBA was slow to react and it took another decade and essentially covert action by Gibson and his colleagues before the salaried architect was in a position within the Institute to begin to effect reform. Gibson's role in this process, and the part played by the ABT warrants further research.

The growing discontent within the profession, brought to a head by the financial problems of the Institute in 1957, finally forced the RIBA to re-evaluate its relationship with its members, their representation within the organisation and its administrative structure. This thesis has shown that Spence's dynamic presidency was central to the process of reform which followed, and that he should rightfully be acknowledged for overseeing the formulation of fundamental changes within the Institute which have been credited to William Holford and Robert Matthew.

Gibson's presidency was less eventful and his one year term of office was too short to have any real impact on the Institute, nevertheless, it appeared

to consolidate the position of the official architect within the profession. The rise of the public sector had, however, merely displaced the previously dominant private sector and deep underlying divisions remained between the groups. These surfaced again during Gibson's presidency as the private sector, struggling to cope against the dominance of the official sector and increasing pressure from builders offering package deals, demanded an Association through which it could speak. Although the request was not met by the RIBA, the issue marked the gradual resurgence of discontent within the Institute which eventually culminated in open dissent between members and Council in the early 1970s; the reiteration of familiar complaints about status and representation revealing how little perceptions had changed over seven decades.

This thesis does not claim to present definitive studies of either Spence or Gibson, nor can it hope to do justice to the enormous complexities of the architectural profession and the wider society in which they operated. It has highlighted many aspects of the profession, and of their careers, which suggest fruitful avenues for future research. The recent appraisal of Spence's life and career has reasserted his due place within the history of twentieth-century British architecture, it is hoped that Gibson's life and career have now been highlighted as being worthy of similar treatment.